LESLEY'S GUARDIANS.

LESLEY'S GUARDIANS.

BY

CECIL HOME.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

London and Cambridge.
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1864.

Cambridge:
PRINTED BY C. J. CLAY, M.A.
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

CONTENTS TO VOLUME II.

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

CHAPTER V.

CHAPTER VI.

CHAPTER VII.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHAPTER IX.

CHAPTER X.

CHAPTER XI.

CHAPTER XII.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHAPTER XIV.

LESLEY'S GUARDIANS.

CHAPTER I.

LADY LEONORA HURST'S BALL.

LADY Leonora Hurst was famous in Anglo-Parisian society for her entertainments. Not so much for their splendour or their elegance, though they were deficient in neither, as for their fitness, a far more essential quality and a far less easy to attain, being unpurchasable and hardly learnable. Everything and everybody fell into the right place as a matter of course at her house; the guests were just the people that ought to have met each other, the amusements just those of all others most appropriate to the society. There was no effort and no neglect, every one seemed to enjoy himself after his own fashion and the

hostess moved as untrammelled as her visitors, with no show of being on duty, yet at the end of the evening every one had received the due amount of attention. All said it was wonderful how Lady Leonora managed. For the phenomenon was too invariable to allow of its being looked on, as you might have done the first time, as the result of happy accident—that appearance of happy accident being the great charm of the whole matter. And it *was* wonderful. Mr Hurst played his part excellently, with quite a semblance of independent action, and was even equal to carrying out by himself the hints he received; and she had besides allies scattered about the room, none of them however aware of each other and some quite unconscious, playing their important parts without any idea of it. Still Mrs Hurst was *all* in the thing.

She had bestowed herself on society. Her taste her intellect her kindness and her tact, of all which good gifts she had received in full measure, were devoted to its service. She was one of those women who *must* be in earnest. If she had re-

mained single she would probably have been a vehement district visitor and general committee-woman of all good works; if she had married wisely (by which I mean happily, not merely prudently) she might have been a warm-loving careful wife, self-willed perhaps, for that was always in her, but still a woman to be blessed in her household. But she had been married, with her own consent but not at all by wish of hers, to a "county" man, much older than herself, whose most conspicuous merit lay in having been made the heir of an uncle who had thus atoned to the representative of the honours of the family for the downfall he had brought them by becoming a city millionaire. Mr Hurst proved, for a weak-brained man, a decent sort of husband enough, being docile in a way quite uncommon to that generally pig-headed kind, but he never could be better than harmless. So having neither home joys nor home cares, having plenty of ambition and nothing else to do with it, Lady Leonora Hurst found *her* "woman's mission" in the amelioration of party giving, a matter in which a few

more such missionaries might be desirable. She had personal facilities for the cause, she was young handsome and *spirituelle* and she had a good deal of feminine vanity, which, implying a little well-managed coquetterie, has its advantages in such a case.

She chose to live in Paris where she had ample scope for her ministrations and probably (for it is always so when there is less real need for the enlightener) greater appreciation of them than in London, and her husband, if he had not wished for the change of sphere till she told him to do so, appreciated its advantages and, associated in her salon triumphs, thoroughly enjoyed them and reverenced her.

There was no need for saying so much here of pleasant Lady Leonora Hurst, but it happens that I am thinking a good deal of her, a good deal more than I have written. Perhaps I am sorry to think of a woman with capabilities of the highest and most generous womanhood spending herself in so unsatisfying a labour. If I am it is only for the sake of the woman herself, not

for any loss of a worker the world has in her. For the intercourse, the routine, called Society is a great thing and a right-tending and should be made a greater and a good. And the numbness and constraint and tediousness that so often oppress it are very much the reverse of an assistance to that result. Society, if it is not an enjoyment and a freedom after the Egyptian brick-making which, do what you will, claims at least a formidable portion of the happiest man's work-day existence, is a revolting tyranny to be fled from at all hazards if a man has any regard for his moral and mental well-being. What right can anybody have to decoy me into a penal drawing-room on pretence of politeness to me, and then to keep me there, crushed into temporary Cretinism by the overwhelming weight of dulness, for hours in which I might at least have had the advantage of bodily sleep at home, on pretence of politeness to him—or rather to her, that kind of torture being under feminine rule chiefly. Surely hospitality, and even etiquette, must have been designed for something less cruel

than this, designed to promote the general well-being, not to become so dire a burden, so dull an hypocrisy. There is something ludicrous in the idea of a dull party—a number of grown people come together like children on purpose to amuse themselves and then labouring painfully at pretending to do it while each wishes at heart that it were possible to say, "This is very tiresome, let us go home and be comfortable;" yet like most ludicrous things it has little point to those concerned in it, and like most ludicrous things it represents an underlying evil. For it means one channel of communication between man and men choked up, one process of education for the individual and for his age stultified. And if such a woman spending herself in such a way could, as it seemed she did, do something towards reforming the evil, she worked for the world and did some good for it, whatever she missed for herself.

I do not say that Lady Leonora had thought of it thus. I suppose she only wanted to get the most enjoyment she could out of her life and to

please her vanity with her little fashion sovereignty. But to do this she was anxious to promote the enjoyment of others, and her code of laws was drawn up with some reference to kindness as well as to conventionality (whose rigour indeed she mitigated as far as a mere mortal might dare) so that her *réunions* were the pleasantest, most sociable meetings, and withal had a high-toned refinement rarely to be met with. And these qualities extended even to what might be called her exoteric gatherings, her most accessible *réunions*—she had several stages through all of which only a select few could boast of passing. But admission to any of them was a thing to be valued as a privilege worth introductions to any half-dozen of the most brilliant salons in Paris.

Such being the case it was not surprising that when Lady Leonora Hurst chose to give a ball there went out a foretalk of it among all the sons and daughters of fashion, and that among the newly-arrived was great longing to gain an entrance into this famous assembly where would

be gathered together all that was most celebrated in the Fashion-capital for rank and fortune and beauty and wit and literature, and even science, for the French philosopher has a little of the native quicksilver in his veins too and is not above mixing with the frivolous majority and even (O German, O English sage, be lenient to his infirmity) enjoying himself with them. But, Lady Leonora not being fond of lessening the enjoyment of her fête to her acquaintances by crowding the room with non-acquaintances, such entrance was not particularly easy to gain. So that many an inquiring traveller who had yearned for such an opportunity of seeing celebrities of whom he might afterwards say, or haply write, "When I was in company with the great So-and-so at Paris, etc.," was lying in bed at his hotel cross and discomfited that night, not *blessing* exactly the clatter of carriages passing *à pas* along the street leaving or seeking, as the route might lie, that inexorable Lady Leonora's; and many a pink-cheeked novice kept late vigils, ready to bring forth her white tarlatan and rose wreaths at a

moment's notice, in case some happy turn of the wheel should favour her at the last hour, and finally lay down to rest with a disappointed heart fancying the whirl of the dances and the jubilant music and the glitter of lights and the soft dimness of conservatories in that inaccessible Elysium.

But you of course are of the élite and go to Lady Leonora's ball, so I am not called upon to expatiate to you on the brilliance of this scene, and of course you know every one "worth knowing," so I need not point out to you these white-shouldered jewel-sparkling women conscious of admiration, and these star-breasted men (they say that little wizened grey man has more decorations than any man in Europe in his possession)—you see all these for yourself. But I may suppose that you are too much in request among these distinguished people to have noticed my special friends there.

Two of them are, according to received custom on such occasions, doing their best to spoil the delicate papering of the walls with the impression of their black cloth shoulders. Of these, one, without any special pretension to good looks, is

what you might call emphatically a fine man, form and face have each a show of power about them, there is not likely to be much weakness of any kind in him. Although there has been no Moustache Movement yet, you could make him nothing but an Englishman under the thick beard he wears, you can trace the resolute lines of the jaw. And his accurate white gloves do not deceive you into any idea that there are soft hands in them; you see that they must be firm and sinewy, accustomed to many kinds of use. He is one of those people who somehow impress you with an idea that they look older than they are, although you do not know their age, and you would say of him, and come pretty near the truth, "He is a year or two under thirty I should suppose, though he looks more." His hair is something of a darker shade of the brown of the copper beech, and his complexion a spoilt fair one, so that the whole face might be in brown tones—excepting the intense violet grey of the eyes, so dark as to pass for black in all lights where you would not expect to be able to detect the hard glitter of black.

He is Maurice Maurice of Thorncroft, a wealthy landowner, and he has just arrived in Paris, but not for the first time.

The other, the Honourable Hugh Durne, a somewhat younger man, blessed with that peculiar plainness, excessive yet refined, which is almost as effective as handsomeness (in a man be it understood) and is nearer akin to the *air distingué;* wondrously sharp featured and with upslanting eyebrows that gave him as he flattered himself something of a Mephistophilean countenance, is his evening companion and Virgil in these enchanted circles. It pleased Hugh Durne to be of a sardonic character, and as Fortune's only and therefore unkind favour to him had been that title of Honourable, shared with an infinity of brothers and sisters, children of a small-estated viscount, perhaps he was called to it naturally.

Both are too remarkable not to draw some notice to themselves, and both too used to notice to remark it. They have been for some time leaning back in that careless way discussing the passers by.

"Who is that in the diamond circlet?—Oh! Madame la Duchesse de Liancourt. What an invaluable art is this paste making now the jewellers have perfected it."

"Her brilliants are not paste?"

"Perhaps not, the Duke plays high, he may have won enough to redeem the family diamonds for the occasion. But I suppose you don't mean to take all you see for genuine in a place like this, you don't mean to believe everything."

"I mean to believe all I can. It would spoil my pleasure to look through your yellow spectacles."

"Pleasure? Do I hear a voice from a young lady's boarding school?"

"I find my pleasure in a thing of this kind, or I shouldn't come. What duty brings *you* I can't say. Look what a happy face that girl has, it does one good to see it."

"Ah! no wonder, that's the heir to a millionaire she's with. That's his father, that fat old respectability opposite. He really *can* put in his h's."

"Why not? It's old Nesbitt the brewer, isn't it? He's a very passable scholar I hear, and I don't

suppose he was brought up among people that couldn't speak Queen's English."

"You are amiable, Maurice: it's a pity."

"Don't distress yourself, my good fellow. I know your theory, but I don't think my amiability will stand much in my way."

"You can afford it. There goes Lord Woodlegh. What a ferocious fool it looks! One seldom sees the two qualities so well combined. Look at his smile, though he must mean to fascinate that little bead-eyed doll, Clara Stanworth.—Did I hear you use a strong expression under cover of that monstrous beard? You wern't actually swearing?"

"No I was not."

"It sounded a little strong though—something like 'brute.' You don't admire Lord Woodlegh?"

"It's a disgrace to be called gentleman if that fellow is to be classed as one. He's simply all that's—Don't let's talk of the animal. I wonder how our dainty little hostess admitted him."

"His wife does angel very tolerably, and she's here with him."

"Yes, I know her a little and a good deal about

her—she *is* something of the angel order of wives, *very* good and a little dull. Poor thing is she with him again?—I wish I'd an excuse for kicking him."

"Do you think it would do her much good? For I don't suppose you care much about improving his mind with the vigorous little argument you propose."

"Can you tell me, Durne, who is that young lady with the very bright complexion?—there standing nearly opposite by the pier-glass."

"Very bright complexion? Oh yes, I see. I *am* informed that she does not rouge. That is a young widow, a Mrs Raymond. Not very disconsolate I conceive, but the worthy man left her all his money they say, and it was no trifle. Not so bad you see if you are smitten there—as I suspect you must be, for I've been wondering for five minutes at least why you were staring across there and hadn't a tongue to ask who she was."

"I thought I could find out for myself, I recognized the face. Yes, Mrs Raymond, to be sure."

"You know her, then?"

"Yes, I knew her pretty well at one time. She has rather gained in appearance since—changed just enough to make it possible to doubt if it were the same at first."

"You'll claim acquaintance?"

"I don't know about *claiming;* it's a bore introducing oneself when the other side doesn't recognize one. But I like her and I shall certainly try to remake the acquaintance. Can you do it for me?"

"No. But if it will further you I'll get introduced myself and bring her your way for identification. Is she a reasonable being at all? I've heard she is very blue."

"As I knew her, not very blue and not very reasonable, but full of life."

"I'll try her. Shall I see if I can get some one to introduce you to her at once?"

"No, there's no hurry. I'll wait the issue of your trial."

So presently Mr Durne was formally named to Mrs Raymond and thereby certified a person fit for her to dance with, and by-and-by she did dance with him. They whirled round and round

with but few short pauses, and few remarks were exchanged; for Durne was easily danced out of breath, and the lady seemed chary of originating conversation. Mr Durne was not displeased to think that she was a little afraid of him. Resolved to make her talk, however, he led her, as the dance ended, to a vacant seat near where Maurice was still standing, and began "drawing her out."

She did not seem afraid of him at all; she answered quite easily his first remarks on the music and the tasteful decoration of the rooms, she brought out gay little common-places very appropriately. But somehow Durne had received an idea that she pretended to learning, and he tried her with a Latin quotation.

Mrs Raymond smiled in the proper conversational degree but had no answer forthcoming. Mr Durne tried another quotation; it was not particularly applicable indeed, but if she *was* a blue he thought his making it at all would flatter her, and if not, she would at any rate be unable to detect its want of point.

But this time Mrs Raymond only looked puz-

zled and did not smile; there was nothing for it, but to apologize for his mistimed classicality.

"But," he explained, "I thought you belonged to the learned sisterhood, and my unfortunate quotations were so hackn—h'm—famous that I thought a lady Latinist would follow them."

Mrs Raymond looked up quickly, so quickly that Durne was afraid she suspected that he was laughing at her in spite of his deferential manner. However, if she *had* been doubtful she seemed to be reassured and merely asked, it must be owned in a tone suggesting some little of the pretty silliness of pretty women, "But why did you think me one?"

"I hardly know, I think I heard that a tenth Muse had appeared at Lady Leonora's most jealously guarded *soirées d'intimité,* in the likeness of a fair widow. Mrs Raymond, you are famous already."

"How very nice," said Mrs Raymond, twisting the corner of her lace handkerchief and looking down coyly, "Only I'm afraid I don't quite de-

serve it. Do you think now they really could have meant me?"

"Why not?" asked Durne in his blandest tone.

"Only that I am not learned, you know. Did you really think I was?" Another coil in the rope of cambric and lace.

"I assure you," Durne replied gravely, "I should not have been surprised to find you quite familiar with the Latin accidence and able to construe Eutropius."

"Oh dear! How clever you must have thought me, for a lady. And can you construe that?"

"I think so. I could once."

"How very nice. I do so like literary people."

"You know a great many?"

"Oh no. But I have met one or two. And once I staid for a whole fortnight in the same house with a lady who wrote stories in a fashion-book, "La Mode." She was writing Guendoline de Montmorency then, and she read me some of it."

"She found your criticism valuable, I am sure."

"No? Do you really think so?—No, I don't think she wanted me to criticise it exactly. But do you know she said she thought I could write a story too, if I tried. Just think!"

"Of course you took her advice. May I ask if you were successful? La Mode must be a very fastidious periodical, I should think. Why, you'll be as immortal as the fashions in it."

"Oh, but I don't write in it, I didn't try. Do you think it would have been of any use?"

"I won't presume to doubt that if you bent all your mind to it, with a little practice in writing, you might produce something fit for a place in La Mode. Of course your literary friend was in a position to judge."

"Oh, but she might be only trying to flatter me. But it's very odd she should say that, and now *you* seem to think I could even learn Latin." And Mrs Raymond looked up and looked down, and laughed complacently.

"Yes, I dare say with study you might get to read the Delectus, really," said Durne, not ashamed to take advantage of this simple vanity.

"Oh, really? How nice that would be. I've often heard of the Delectus, but I never expected to be told I should have a chance of being able to read it. Do you think it would be too *blue* of me if I got a master and tried? I'm so fond of literature, and it must be so much more improving in Latin."

"Oh, no doubt." Durne was more and more amused, and the better pleased to question that he saw he had an audience of three or four.

"And what is your favourite style of reading?" He asked.

"Oh, that is so difficult to tell."

"But you have some preference I am sure, history? metaphysics? science for the million?"

"Oh no, I don't know anything scientific. I like reading history though rather. I used to get good marks from my governess for it very often."

"You read Mangnall's invaluable work, I presume."

"Oh no—what a mistake, Mr Durne! Mangnall's isn't for reading, you learn it by heart. I

read Goldsmith and Mrs Markham, and Ancient History Abridged."

"And you keep your taste for that serious reading still in spite of the distractions of such gay scenes as this?"

"O yes, I like serious reading."

"And poetry? You care for that too?

"O yes, poetry is very nice—especially—"

"You are not going to break off there? You were going to confess which of our poets is your special favourite, I know."

"No I wasn't—it is so difficult to say you know—only I think Anon seems to have written some of the sweetest pieces of poetry in Thompson's Selections."

"Ah, I see—I remember now. Yes, he writes on so wide a range of subjects that you must find him all-sufficing."

"Oh, but I have read other poets too, Mrs Hemans and the Corsair and Marmion and those, besides Tennyson of course—and I've read quite difficult ones, Milton and Tupper—and Shakespeare, you know."

"And which do you prefer?" inquired Mr Durne with redoubled earnestness to conceal his danger of laughing as he caught Maurice's eye and saw that he was listening.

"You ask such difficult questions," said the lady.

Durne began: "You are so capable of answering them that"—

"Oh yes, but I *have* remembered, Mr Percival," said Mrs Raymond quite disregarding him and turning abruptly to the partner who claimed her, "I thought you seemed content to wait a little however.—What were you and Lord Streatfield laughing at? mayn't I talk literature as well as other people?" and with a slight bow to Durne she was lost among the dancers.

"Well!" ejaculated Durne falling back on the support of the wall after his conversational labour.

"Tired after all that literary talk, Durne?" asked Lord Streatfield, the tall man with the tall curls, standing next him.

"No, stifled with admiration. That woman is fascinatingly silly, what a delightful gôbemouche

it is!—why, Streatfield, surely it was you who told me she was an esprit fort."

"Not I. I wouldn't undertake to decide what she is," affirmed Lord Streatfield.

"Then was it you, Darlington?"

"Not I," said Captain Darlington. "I have only met her to talk to once and then I thought her uncommonly agreeable. 'Tisn't likely *I* should have tolerated her if she had been one of your *con*founded clever women."

"Nor she you," Durne could not refrain from adding sotto voce in spite of the risk that the handsome soldier, (who was at least three removes from a fool,) would catch at the import of his murmur for Streatfield's ears.

"But," said Lord Streatfield laughing, "she *must* have something in her, Durne, though you have failed to get at it yet, for Lady Leonora won't give a party without asking her, and on those sacred Wednesday evenings those who understand her best say that she watches like a young lady looking out for her pet partner to see whether Mrs Raymond is coming or not."

"Very likely. If she's not witty herself she's the cause of wit in others, I suppose."

"No, no. Be sure Lady Leonora doesn't hand over one of her guests as fair game for the others. The little woman has her own ideas of things and doesn't approve of that kind of amusement. I believe she'd as soon admit a cobra capella to her Wednesdays as she would you, Durne."

"Hers is the loss, but I forgive her—the more readily that I imagine that an entertainment carried out on that principle, where nobody may laugh at anybody else, must be singularly dull."

"Well," said Maurice, striking in for the first time, "I suppose, as a general rule, ridicule doesn't fret a man much, but the possibility of its going on around you among people who are outwardly all friendliness gives a feeling of treachery in society that isn't enjoyable, and to women ridicule is an alarming thing, I fancy. I vote for Lady Leonora's system."

"She studies that Fashion-book to some purpose at any rate," said Lord Streatfield.

She meant Mrs Raymond, who had paused within sight again.

"H'm," doubted Durne, "yes? I don't know. Look at her coiffure, the other women all wear their hair stood out over those monstrous frisettes, and hers is nearly close to the head, then that roll of hair with a mere knot of flowers instead of the flower garden of *cachepeigne* the others all have hanging at the back. It's pretty, but it's not the reigning style."

Durne was a great connoisseur in these matters.

"But it suits her to perfection," said Lord Streatfield, "and gives her an individuality too."

"She'd better have been like the others," answered Durne.

And was he not right? Even in so small a thing it would have been safer to be "like the others." Individuality is a risking thing for a woman; it seems to call for investigation, and in nine cases out of ten to be noticed is to be censured; perhaps in eight out of that nine to deserve to be censured. Oh ladies, lectured in hortatory essays and goaded

in satirical novels to leave off this injudicious article of dress and that ill-advised custom and adopt such and such highly sensible innovations, you surely always understand in ellipsis that you are to become so suddenly improved *in a body*, not by martyr units. Never think, sensible woman, of wearing a hoop the less or a self reliance the more to please the husband or father or brother (I won't speak of the lover, who is bound to see no fault in anything you do or do not) whom you have so often heard denounce the folly of womankind, may be with a special reference to yourself, for not doing these things. He would be ashamed of you. The very Gamaliel, at whose feet you have sat, drinking in his printed wisdom through reverent eyes, would laugh at you if he knew, he would disavow you, "never having meant the thing to be carried to that excess." Nay, even if the Gamaliel were one of those special women writers of special books for women (who apparently require minute codes of morality all to themselves, other than those men are expected to gather from their Bibles) she too might, though in her case it is not so

certain, refuse to acknowledge her disciple and declare that she advised general progress and not singularity. It must always be "better like the others" for you. As to the advocates of singularity for its own sake as a renovating force in society, it is only each man's own singularity he will much appreciate; he is pretty sure to laugh at yours.

"It won't do her any harm here," said Captain Darlington. "Ladies in France don't care so much about being pin for pin copies of each other."

Maurice laughed. "Yes, the French never were a discreet people. They don't even yet fully appreciate the safety of uniformity."

He was really answering Durne, giving or accepting an underlying meaning to his last light criticism. This undermeaning happened to be an old question between them. But they had fought it too often to begin again now. It was not worth while at the end of the dispute. Durne would still be a supporter and Maurice an impugner of the necessity for a tight fitting conventionality.

Indeed, there were not many things in which the two men had a congeniality. They were chance

friends; often thrown together at the same school, at the same college, in the same society, without being attracted to each other in the least, till somehow meeting as travellers on a beaten route they became companions for a sideways exploration of their own planning, and, amid its sundry haps and mishaps, came to do each other many a good service; and thus there was now between them a certain disputatious but reliable kindness, and they were often and intimately together.

It was not like Hugh Durne to take the trouble of repeating so easy a scene as his "drawing out" Mrs Raymond had proved, but somehow he had, as he said, found her *fascinatingly* silly, or at all events something in her made him curious to see more into her character, and he managed to dance with her again.

But this time he could make nothing of her. "I am tired of talking about that," she said, when he began on "literature" again.

He could find now no better subject to answer his purpose than the importance of dancing as an art.

"Yes," she said, "it has to be learned like other things."

He went on telling her how diligently he cultivated it—so many hours a week he considered necessary for practice—such means he took for acquiring correctness in time. He had great command over his countenance and did not even smile as he talked all this nonsense.

"Ah," she said, "I have known many other gentlemen who never could get to dance well. I dare say you didn't begin soon enough. But you need not be disheartened, you get round the room pretty well."

Durne hated her silliness for the moment. He would have liked to dance well and had a half impression that he did not, an impression annoying to him because he considered the accomplishment necessary to a gentleman and its clumsy exercise a thing to make him ridiculous to the "dancing fools," as he classed Captain Darlington and Co. She had vexed him therefore, and the more that he was cross at his own stupidity for carrying the war into a region where she had the upper hand.

He tried the last resource of a man who can think of nothing to talk of with his partner, and fell into a strain of indirect compliment, talking to her of herself.

Mrs Raymond looked vacantly at him, forced him to repeat the same thing two or three times, answered at last with a meaningless "Oh!" and for the rest of the time he was with her could not be got out of a monosyllabic state. Durne was delighted to introduce Maurice to her and be released from attendance.

"Yes, so we are old friends, I remember Mr Maurice quite well, though I didn't recognize his face at first," she said cordially holding out her hand to the new comer. "Thank you Mr Durne, I don't care for finding a seat, I will let you go and look for your partner for this quadrille."

"That is a detestable man!" she continued vehemently, looking after him.

"I don't think so, Mrs Raymond, he is a friend of mine."

She gave a little start while he was speaking and her colour rose over her forehead for a

moment, but she answered him with a wilful look, smiling, "Well, it is too late for me to alter my opinion, and if I retracted you wouldn't believe in such a prompt conversion."

"I don't know, I think I remember that you used to be changeable."

The colour flashed over neck and shoulders even, as she answered petulantly, "I wish if people persist in remembering me at all they'd remember truer things about me."

"I am sorry to have *persisted*—"

"And I am glad," she interrupted, looking frankly in his face. "I like to meet a friend again though I don't approve of being charged with a vice all in a moment."

"A vice?"

"Well, never mind—I don't want to argue on the accusation, if you don't insist on provoking a defence from me."

"No indeed," said Maurice, "Why should I? I had no intention of bringing a serious accusation, I only wished to allow you the lady's privilege of changing."

"I don't want it, thank you—I have nothing serious enough to decide on to make me want to have the power of changing my mind—when one has no cares one has no doubts."

"Is that so certain? It wants thinking of."

"I don't know if I think it certain—I'll see if I know by next time I see you—Have you come lately from Thorncroft?" asked Mrs Raymond, suddenly.

"No, I have neglected the place sadly, but I believe it's well looked after. I am from Italy last."

"And so are Miss Raymond and I, it is strange we never met till now—No! I don't see that it *is* strange, there is more than one town in Italy and people don't all take them in the same order —You've never been at Thorncroft since it belonged to you?"

"Yes indeed, I was there when—when it unfortunately became mine, as you may have heard," said Maurice gravely, "and remained there some weeks arranging affairs. And I was there for a month three years ago, but you were living in town at the time."

"I have made great changes at home since then," said Mrs Raymond, rushing on with the conversation at a great rate, "I am a great improver you must know—I don't mean in the house, I wouldn't touch the old place for worlds—but in the pleasure grounds—I have had that long strip of field that runs to your grove taken into them too."

"Indeed! Then we are quite next door neighbours now."

"Yes, we must be good ones—if you go to live at Thorncroft that is—enough to tell each other the news you know—one gossips in the country.

"*Is* there ever any news in that neighbourhood now?"

"Well it is a dull one I own, we want more nice housefuls. And we can't afford to lose one —we want a Master and Mistress at Thorncroft."

"The first will be forthcoming in the summer or sooner, and for the second—"

"The thing we clamour for most, especially myself who so want a cozy lady neighbour," interrupted Mrs Raymond.

"Well it's not exactly a thing I clamour for myself, but I'll try to bear my neighbours' wishes in mind."

"Do, it will be sensible—Miss Raymond looks very tired, I must ask her if we shall go home. Will you—oh! here she comes. Yes, Violet, I think we had better go. Good night Mr Maurice."

"Shall I not be allowed to call on you Mrs Raymond?"

"Oh! yes do, we shall be very happy to see you—Avenue Boissière Champs Elysée, the first house—we shall like to see you."

She had found out the quicker that Violet Raymond was tired, that she began to find it difficult to keep up the conversation with her new old friend. They had not met for so long that now they did meet there was nothing to talk about. And indeed, it is easier to make talk with a stranger than with a person once familiarly known, but long enough ago for the friendly link to have worn thin. You remember matters closely concerning him of which you could once seem aware without intrusion, you would like to learn

their issue, but you are not sure that he will now think you sufficiently acquainted with him to justify the allusion; you think of telling him some circumstance of your own condition, but you doubt whether he would care to know it. Very likely you do not care much about him, still you meet on the footing of old acquaintances and can hardly ignore it, and enter at once on the chance topics of the hour with the indifference of a recent introduction.

"Well," said Durne, who saw the conversation from no great distance, "certainly when that lady *does* begin to talk, she does it persistently. She seemed as if she were afraid of leaving a moment's pause, in case of not being able to start again."

And very likely that was the truth. At any rate the conversation had been dashed through in a wonderfully short time. And both Maurice and Mrs Raymond retained from it a consciousness of having talked with very little meaning and no thought. And each of them was something doubtful whether it had been worth while to renew their acquaintance.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE TUILLERIES GARDENS.

MAURICE and Durne were sauntering together next day on the Terrasse des Feuillants. It was a bright brisk afternoon, the sunlight was astir on the stripped branches of the great horsechestnuts, and the old Tuilleries Palace had its windows glittering and for once looked awake, in spite of its grey gloom against the fogless sky. The pleasant weather had brought out countless promenaders through the gardens; there were passings and repassings, recognitions and stares of inspection, silk-robed dames swept along and swarthy Zouaves slouched in the broad walk on the other side of the trees, infantine coquettes showed off their grace and deftness skipping fifty, sixty, eighty, a hundred times over the rope, their com-

panions standing by counting, admiring and emulous, and then tripping aside to take their turns at swinging it for the next performer with an air and a bow, "C'est à Mademoiselle maintenant," while their fashionably dressed mothers sat chatting near.

It was like the spring time, "Particularly spring-like," Durne had just observed, "It only wants an east wind to be vividly spring like."

"There's our friend Paul," returned Maurice irrelevantly.

"Who?—Oh, young De l'Aubonne—here he comes to join us, with conversation brimming out of him."

"What will you bet he doesn't make us his confidants in some new love affair?"

"I can forestall his confession this time—he was an attendant of your Mrs Raymond's last night."

"Oh, that's a month old, his 'folle passion' must be frozen out by this time, he informed me the 'prude Veuve' was 'glaciale'."

"She has come to a thaw then, I presume; I heard her send him for her bouquet with the

pert supremacy such women affect over *the* partner of the evening."

"I fancy that's only a natural despotic tendency of hers. It struck me she got rid of *you* rather cavalierly," said Maurice, with a twinkle in his eyes. He was not sure that he could make a protest for his old acquaintance, but at least he could adventure a retort on her behalf.

"I admit it, and I am not humiliated," said Durne. "These are victories which one allows to the small fry—a silly underbred woman can take greater license—"

Maurice gave his arm a grip—there were three ladies in front of them, and they had just come up too close not to be overheard. He lifted his hat as they passed, one of the ladies was Mrs Raymond.

"If she has heard!" he said, laughing to Durne.

"Well, as I suppose we shall meet her pretty often this winter, it might be awkward. But after all, if she has heard, her indignation will fall on me only and I am more than half tired of her already."

"I don't wonder that you didn't find her a good butt, you'll soon tire of that work with her. Well, Paul, are we stopping you on your way towards those ladies?"

"We will accost them together, if you will," offered Paul de l'Aubonne obligingly, "I saw that you were both presented to Mde. Raymond last night."

"No hurry," said Maurice carelessly, "take a turn with us first."

The consequence of which was however that they, walking faster than the ladies, presently turned and faced them only a few paces off.

"No help for it," said Durne in an affected aside, "Maurice, there's one apiece, if you will only keep me from that silly widow. I'll even try the violet rather than that."

On the whole it was a pity Mrs Raymond's sister-in-law had been named Violet—not that she herself thought so, she only saw that she was still very much like what she had been as a girl, when people used to say how well the name suited her,

and when she had been told in a Valentine, which she could (and did indeed) still read complacently before the looking-glass, that her pale straight featured face, and the smile her small mouth wore, showed that she did no disgrace to the flower whose name she bore, and that her flaxen locks and large blue eyes combined to make her fair, and that of all sweet English flowers the writer prized the modest Violet rare. She still possessed these charms of her eighteenth year, the harmless regularity of features, the very small mouth, the large sky-blue eyes (the sky-blue of a winter morning) the flaxen hair, very smooth though not lustrous and not abundant, and if with a few silvering threads among it, its dim blondeness was of so fortunate a tint that they were not discernible through it under ordinarily favourable circumstances. But the smooth primrose tone of her younger fairness had rusted and thickened, her cheeks had encroached upon her eyes and mouth, she was obese, dumpily obese, so that the fat sat in creases on her short throat and made it all one with her chin, and she was fifty. That

is the unfortunate side of those pretty sentimental names which (especially in novels) are coming so much into fashion now; a time must come in all lives of ordinary length when their poetic grace will be lost in a too palpable incongruity and they will be pronounced with a certain comic tone—Violet, May, Lily, Daisy—and May is a wrinkled spinster long since out of bloom, and Lily wears a false front and combs it low to hide the crow's-feet, and Daisy is a gaunt masculine woman with hard features and a gruff old voice, and Violet is rotund and flabby and creased like our Violet Raymond! Ladies who bear these dainty appellations should either droop, blighted in their spring, into an early grave (which would be the most appropriate course) or have a homelier one to fall back on in later life.

"The violet's head is small for the stem," said Paul as the stout lady advanced in her green silk flounces and fashionably diminutive violet velvet bonnet, a smile of welcome creeping over her face. Marion, hardly noticing them, was talking merrily to her companion on the other side.

"Was that pretty girl with them last night?" asked Durne.

"Pardon? that rosy blonde? I have not seen her before I think," answered Paul, who at present had only eyes for Marion.

Afterwards, as they stood talking, it came to him for a moment in a vague dreamy way that he might have seen the rosy blonde before—Where? Was it that she was like that hateful English girl whom he had seen in white bridal dress, harpy-like tearing his brother's heart? But the rosy blonde, who knew that Paul had seen her before, had known that he was near and would presently speak to Marion, some minutes before he was aware of her, and was prepared with an easy unconsciousness, so that under its influence the likeness presently faded from his eyes. And then the young person he had seen was of marble white complexion and looked older than this girlish pink-cheeked friend of Mde. Raymond. Besides all Englishwomen, all the pretty ones at least, had a certain resemblance—and the momentary thought passed. He struck into the

conversation again, "Madame is too cruel, she satirizes us all."

"Is it true, M. de l'Aubonne? Well at any rate the combat is forced on me this time. Why should Mr Durne, who knows how unbecoming it is for ladies to affect to have any instruction not too insignificant for him to have received himself, turn our harmless ignorance into ridicule?"

"Your ignorance, Madame! Can he venture it?"

"I assure you," said Durne, "I can quote you historical authority for the attack of the mob on the Tuilleries."

"The Comic History of France for the details, I presume," said she smiling quietly,—"Oh don't apologize, I'm sure it is very good of you to take the trouble of amusing me—whether it is at your expense or mine."

Durne was in difficulties; he had mistaken his game and the next move would be an embarrassing one. Luckily for him Maurice, who had stood an amused listener to the conversation, which had been carried on almost entirely between Mrs Raymond and his misguided friend, (for Lesley had

her own reasons for speaking little, Miss Raymond could only talk in tête à tête and about herself, and Paul was rather puzzled at what was going on) now came to the rescue.

"Durne has run a tilt with his eyes shut. He is rather given to conversational lancebreaking Mrs Raymond, it is a little weakness of his. I would'nt insinuate that it is one of yours, still I remember—"

"I hate people who remember," she said abruptly. "There is always enough to say about the Present without dragging one's remarks out of the Past—as if we were so many parish registrars to keep count of all these burials."

"Is the Past *always* buried?" asked Lesley, and then flushed crimson—she had spoken because it seemed time for her to speak and she felt she had said a thing unsuitable to the occasion.

"Now Lesley! Will you be good enough to keep your doleful remarks for our next private arguing?" "And why," she went on in French, "are we all speaking English, while M. de l'Aubonne looks surprised at our incivility?"

"I beg his pardon," said Maurice, "it was I who forgot, it was so natural to address you in English."

"And Maurice is a great advocate for the natural," said Durne.

"Are you?" asked Marion earnestly of Maurice.

"I certainly think that some of the chains of society might be loosened with advantage," he answered; "all that are not necessary as social landmarks and to keep half educated people from forgetting the bounds of true courtesy."

"Oh yes," she exclaimed, flashing upon him, her whole face lit up, "You are right I know. Why are we to go about like bowing and curtseying machines with all the sense and feeling ground out of us by our own wheels?"

"English again, Marion," said Lesley softly.

"Oh well, I can't help it, how can I talk French to Maurice—I beg your pardon, *Mr* Maurice—I am used to hear you spoken of without the prefix, you see," apologized Marion, her excitement dying out, "so that I am in danger of doing it myself without knowing it."

"It's very natural you should; my having Christian name and surname alike leads most people to drop the Mr."

"I suppose you would do so to everybody too, yourself, if you could settle society the way you want," suggested Miss Raymond, self-applausive for her irony.

"What nonsense, Violet, *do*—" Marion began but checked herself and continued demurely, "I think you haven't understood Mr Maurice altogether as he means."

"Does ever any one understand another altogether as he means?" said Durne, "I'm afraid that's one of the difficulties of life."

"I think so," she said half sadly, and she looked more kindly at Durne now that they had agreed for once.

"Happily," said Paul, "it rarely matters whether one understands altogether or not—for most conversations an approximation suffices. It is rarely one meets brilliancy and meaning combined as Madame combines them."

"M. de l'Aubonné, your compliments improve

daily; do you write them down when the inspiration comes to you and learn them by heart ready for use?" she said quickly.

"*I* cannot expect to escape Madame's sparkling ridicule, but if my compliments improve it is that those qualities in her which inspire them improve daily," answered Paul holding his ground.

"Oh thank you, how pretty!"

There was no answer possible to that, Paul was reduced to silence.

"The French have a particular grace in paying compliments," remarked Miss Raymond, "I used to notice it in some foreigners, Prussians I think, who used to come to my father's house when I was a girl—a little while before my brother married—quite high people, for they were introduced to us by a cousin of ours who was intimate with the Duchess of Windermere—she used to call her Clara! I only mention it to show they really were people of position. And I remember one of them saying to me,—I had a likeness of myself and it was thought by some people, I suppose out of kindness, to be pretty, so I naturally said when

they were looking at it, 'It is flattered I think for I have not so much colour;'—and he said with the most courteous bow, '*Can* one flatter with such an original?' I only mention it to show how courteous he was, not that I think I was so—"

But here Paul who, like all the others, had listened to this narrative with a strong desire for its conclusion, interrupted, with a bow, "Mademoiselle, permit me, who am also a Frenchman, to echo the remark of my compatriot, which requires no excuses on your part."

Violet bowed, smiled, shook her lace into place, and subsided. She had been a little bewildered at finding herself wandering into one of her entangled speeches with so many listeners, but had failed to find her way out of it: Paul's interruption, being sweetened with a compliment, answered the end very well.

Marion was looking annoyed. "It is the most extraordinary thing," she used to say to Lesley. "Miss Raymond is a lady by birth, though no one would think it to hear her so constantly telling

those detestable anecdotes, where the whole point is that the person who did or said whatever inanity it was had a title—and she has in most other respects lady-like feelings too, but she tries othe people's terribly—that cousin who calls the Duchess of Windermere Clara!—a nice unaffected little woman too, quite harmless in herself, but she will be the death of me—or of Violet; we can't both live in one world if she won't give up her 'Anecdotes of people who had friends in the red book.'"

"Do not mind it," Lesley used to answer, "do not be moved from your determination to shew constant kindness to your husband's sister, by a little weakness on her part. And, after all, those who see her often must find out that she *is* a lady in spite of it."

But, as she stood by and heard the cousin who called the Duchess of Windermere Clara brought into the narrative, Lesley found self-command difficult; looking into Marion's perturbed face she shared her annoyance, and yet the inclination to laugh was almost irrepressible. Finally she gave

way at Paul's compliment, all she could achieve was not to laugh aloud. Marion looked at her almost crossly, then she too gave way, and under that sanction there was a general untightening of lips screwed up to gravity point.

"What are you all laughing at?" asked Miss Raymond innocently; "I did not catch it."

"At me apparently, Mademoiselle," said Paul politely.

Durne was about to volunteer some explanation of his own, but Marion turned on him with an imperious gesture, "I will not have it, Mr Durne."

He bowed, and she turned from him to Maurice: "At least you cannot remember that *I* used my lance against the unarmed."

"Not often."

"Not often! Never."

"One friend of yours was not always well armed against you," he said with a half laugh, and then regretted it when he saw a startled troubled look flit over her face.

It was gone in a moment. "Will lance-breaking

be allowed in your reformed society?" she asked jestingly.

"Certainly, in a fair field. I don't want a social revolution, I only want a little fair freedom added to the charter."

"Well, keep to your creed," she said with the flash again. "Act up to it and you'll do some good; you are a man and can, we can't, we, poor things, have got to stay looking out of the windows of our enchanted prison, waiting for some one to kill the dragons for us."

"You can step over them sometimes if you don't wake them up."

"They'd rush after us and devour us; would'nt they Lesley?"

"You gain nothing by asking me, I have none in my quiet path," said Lesley turning from Paul, who, having decided that she was charming and finding that Mrs Raymond took little notice of him, had engaged her in conversation.

Marion laughed. "You walk talking to the clouds and stars and do not see them—yes, here is one who steps over the dragons and does not wake them."

"It is colder," said Miss Raymond.

"And I am tired of walking," said Marion, "and Miss Hawthorn has an engagement; we will go if you like."

Much to his surprise she shook hands with Durne as she wished him good-bye. "We shall be happy to see you with your friend Mr Maurice."

"By Jove!" he said to Maurice, as they walked off together again,—Paul chose to accompany the ladies—"you *must* be in favour with her high-and-mightiness."

"Why?"

"Why! I'm not to imagine her parting cordiality granted to my own merits, surely."

"Don't imagine it granted to mine then. Mrs Raymond and I are only half friends at best. Do you think her so silly after all?"

"Well, I must own she fairly took me in the other night. But as to what to make of her now—Well, it's only a case of chameleonism, I suppose."

CHAPTER III.

LOVE OR FRIENDSHIP?

If Maurice and Mrs Raymond had parted at Lady Leonora Hurst's in doubt whether it had been worth while to renew their acquaintance, to all appearance they decided in their many after meetings that it had been very well worth while and that they found more pleasure in each other's conversation than in any else the salons in which they met could afford them. Before long people even began to hear reports (of course every one only heard, no one can help what they hear, you know) that "la belle veuve" had at last a suitor whom she did not irritate with alternate sarcasm and indifference; that the two had talked together for an hour in the conservatory at Lady Matchmaker's; that Mrs Argus had detected him at a dozen réunions work-

ing his way up to her while he pretended not to see her; that Mde. Chose had observed how she greeted him without looking at him—a sure sign of some secret embarrassment; that they were engaged (which was wholly untrue); that they were on the point of being engaged (also untrue); that no one would be surprised if they were to be engaged some day (which might be true or might not, one cannot tell). They said, moreover, that she never had herself denied when he called, and that he called daily.

He did not call daily—it would have been inconvenient to Mrs Raymond and probably to himself that he should make such over-frequent visits—but he did call often, and was never ill received. Durne too called often, but no one *heard* any remarks on that; he was poor, and it began to be noised about that la belle veuve's fortune was to go from her if she married again; also he was said to be "not a marrying man." And indeed he was not a likely person to be smitten with Mrs Raymond or any other fair lady, although he found especial pleasure in leading the conversation to some subject

on which she was sure to get excited, and apparently in irritating her against himself. The last was even easier than the first, a little extra superciliousness in his criticisms on passing things and persons, an implied sneer, or a satirical innuendo, would fire her in a moment, and she would rush into the lists with dart and sling as champion of whomever or whatever his missile had struck. Unless, indeed, his criticism had too just grounds and was endorsed by her own anger or scorn, and then she would impetuously bid him feel a little honest indignation for once—was he going through life as The Sneering Philosopher? And didn't he think it time to take his hands out of his pockets and begin doing something for himself or somebody else, instead of standing by looking on as if everything were a play got up for his entertainment and he must not condescend to be too much interested?

After one of these sparring matches Durne said to Maurice, much as he had said to him after others before, "That woman *is* a woman, not one of our pretty dance and simper machines, all tight stays

and minauderies. She has life in her, and feeling too, if I don't mistake. I like her impetuousness."

She always had too much of that, Maurice opined, "But her reality and earnestness make up for it."

"Make up!" Durne echoed contemptuously. "Why! would you have her different? She should learn pretty manners perhaps, just a little hypocrisy and demureness?"

"No, nonsense. But she is so very unguarded."

"Unguarded indeed! There's the beauty of it, man; she is so true herself that she trusts every one. For my part I'm glad to see there is a woman true enough to be unguarded."

"Why, Durne, I never knew you speak so warmly of any body."

"Nonsense; but I do think you don't see the worth of what you are getting."

"I!—I?"

"Oh," said Durne quietly, and walked off thoughtfully as if he had had some important piece of information given him to ponder.

Maurice, smoking his cigar by the fire, pondered too. Could what Durne had had in his mind

come true? Ought it? After all, why not? He found her a woman worthy of his love, and better love than his; she was free to marry him if she would, and he was as free. If her fortune went it would not matter to him, his was ample—nay, it would be all the better, he did not like the thought of being the richer for that marriage of her's. The sorrows and the angers of his first half-fancied love were long past, he smiled at his former mock despair, he had come out of Locksley Hall, the barren moorland and the dreary shore were quite behind him out of sight, and he was treading cheerily along the path of life with a firm step and a manly will, such a woman for companion in it might be—The smoke wreathed dreamily upwards; and who can tell what domestic idylls Maurice traced in the fantastic curves?

Maurice never angered Marion Raymond as his friend Durne did, there was no cynicism in his talk to fret her, the only occasions on which he ruffled her mood were those on which he chanced to make allusion to their former acquaintance. "I wont be reminded that I am grown out of

my girlhood, with any of this talk about old days," she declared; "it's not pleasant when one is nearly twenty-five and doesn't want it known, to be reminded how long one has been grown up." Then they laughed and talked of something else.

Maurice was not flattered into thinking that by this difference in her treatment of him and of his friend she meant to show him preference. He saw plainly that if he chose to imitate Durne's manner and way of talking she would dash at him with the same rapid indignation, and that when she talked amicably with him as she did it was of what he was saying and not of *him* she approved; and she differed from his opinions quite often enough to show that she was unbiassed by influence of his. Still he might think —he could not tell, you see—but it seemed not impossible that he might win her.

If he wooed her. Marion Raymond was not to be won by a word and a smile; she would be tyrannous till the love troth were fairly pledged and she had openly yielded. But the prize was

worth the working for—if only it had not been won once before. There is great talk of the especial fascinations of widows; most bachelors are supposed to be quite incapable of holding their own against the touch of a hand on which glistens the touching memento of the wedding-ring and the music of a voice which can say, "My dear departed husband:" nevertheless some men do not like the idea that, when they are giving *their* rendering of the old play of Darby and Joan, Joan should have rehearsed the part beforehand with a former Darby, that perhaps their fondest matrimonial tendernesses may have the savour of a rechauffé to the smiling wife. Some men would feel a twinge if, while standing at the altar hearing the bride's tremulous whisper making those promises of love and duty, they should remember that they were made for the second time. To be sure a dead rival is safer than a living—but then a rival who has been successful, who has forestalled you, a first husband! Some men do not like it, and Maurice was one. Yet it was already a question in his mind whether

he should not come to love Marion Raymond too well to remember that long.

It might be as well to withdraw himself from the growing intimacy with her until he really know how he desired to stand with her; but then she would naturally resent the seemingly capricious coolness; and after all he could only tell what he did desire by seeing whether her influence grew on him. In fact Maurice's inclination was nearly as plain to himself as it was to Durne, and he did not resist it: only he resolved one thing, that this time he would make sure of himself before he tried to make sure of her. He did not feel conscience-clear in a former case of this kind. Miss Jones and other ferret-eyed Alderford gossips had not scrupled to tell him, with many jokings and hand upraisings and Oh-too-bad-of-you's, that every one in Alderford knew he had driven Miss Annesley to make that marriage—"quite a marriage *de convenience* you know said Miss Jones,"—everyone had seen how dull and pining she grew after Mr Maurice gave her up. And really Miss Jones must admit that

there *were* people who *did* say that Mr Maurice had quite committed himself by the attention he paid her—though to be sure, as Miss Jones always said herself, she was so little better than a child that (as she had often told her when it was going on) Mr Maurice could hardly have thought she would be so silly as to take it in earnest.

Maurice had laughed; "Perhaps the young lady had made it pretty apparent to him that she did not—the Alderford eyes and ears were really too keen for common use, they discovered a good many mares' nests—he should be afraid even to bow to a lady in the neighbourhood of some of them—he must take up his hat and leave Miss Jones now for fear of Alderford thinking he made his call too long." But inwardly he felt the reproach: he had been unfair to that child—how *was* she to know if he was in earnest or not? he had hardly known himself, and he had fancied too that he was doing the right thing in keeping her uncertain. How could he be surprised that her impetuous nature chafed at his fast and loose game? He had been angry at her for a time,

had accused her of fickleness and deceit, had harped about a maiden fair to see who could both false and friendly be, had been shamed through all his nature to have loved so slight a thing, had gone through a paroxysm of the modern form of Werterism, which does not commit suicide, and finally recovering had wondered what it was all about; but he had transferred what blame there was to himself, and when he had forgotten the old lady-love had not forgotten his fault. He did not mean to repeat it now.

The next time he met Mrs Raymond it was at her own house in an evening; the Hursts were there and Lesley. Durne and Maurice came late. "The ceremony of coming late, as if you were afraid of seeing too much of the people you are to meet, was superfluous," said Marion. "We are only a friendly little chatting society, and are all to say and do just what pleases us."

"This is what pleases *me*," he could not help saying in an aside, as he took a seat near her.

"Is it?" she said carelessly; "I didn't know you were so fond of your ease. I shall take

care you always have a cushioned chair in future."

Durne was congratulating Lesley on the success of her Rizpah Watching; he was sincere in it, for he had taken a liking to the simple girl artist with her unassuming dignity and her fresh fair loveliness.

"I am glad," she said, with a bright smile; "it is the best I can do as yet, and if it failed I should be out of heart."

"Failed! my dear Miss Hawthorn," said Lady Leonora; "I should have liked you to hear what I have heard said about it. I am quite proud that I have secured it for myself."

"You refused it to *me*, Lesley," said Marion, reproachfully.

"That is different," said Lesley, curving her slender neck.

Marion understood her thought and said no more; she would not lessen the value of her friendship to Lesley by insisting on becoming her patroness. "I think," she said to herself sometimes, "that for love's sake I could accept an

obligation from a friend and feel it no burden, but Lesley feels differently, I can see, and I can feel how it is with her." So she was careful to do no more good offices for Lesley than she could allow her to repay after ways of her own.

Maurice looked at Lesley and thought she took Marion's good-natured reproach with unwarrantable temper. He felt angry at her, and to rebuke her said, "Miss Hawthorn has a strength of mind few of us possess; she can refuse Mrs Raymond what she wishes."

"Yes," said Marion, "she is a good friend of mine, and won't always let me have my own way."

"What an invaluable friend I could be according to that way of measuring friendship;" said Durne. "If it were not unhappily too great a privilege for me to be allowed, I could find so many ways of fulfilling my share of the compact."

Marion, who thought that to be a friend of hers was decidedly a privilege, was offended at what she privately called Mr Durne's bumptious manner. She turned from him, "I own that I do

consider my friendship a privilege, and therefore I only bestow it on those who think so."

"Then on me," said Lady Leonora, laughing.

"And on me," echoed everybody, Durne included, excepting Maurice.

Marion laughed, "You don't keep time in your chorus. Lady Leonora, won't you give us a better example of musical accuracy? Do look at the open piano asking you to come."

Under cover of Lady Leonora's music came Maurice's "And on *me?*" Marion's eyes dropped before his which enforced the question and she coloured quickly, but she answered lightly, playing with her bracelet, "Oh yes, but you have lagged far behind the others. And, by the way, you were so late in asking me to dance last night that I very nearly told you I wouldn't."

"But I came to you the moment I could get to you—I hadn't been a quarter of an hour in the room."

"Did you?—Well it didn't much matter."

"Did you think I should seek you last?"

"No." She looked at him frankly.

"Thank you."

Perhaps she thought his Thank you assumed too much. "Oh!" she said, "I didn't at all mean that I believed you would make a point of coming to me first." And she laughed and called to her sleepy Skye terrier.

"But *I* did." And for a man whose mind was not made up Maurice's voice and look were singularly expressive.

"We are being too rude not to listen to Lady Leonora's playing—Hush!" said Mrs Raymond, holding up a silencing finger, "you are to listen."

"Does she remember the old Alderford story and think she can't trust me?" thought Maurice to the accompaniment of a Lied ohne Worte, "or is she simply indifferent?" But he perceived that he had outstripped his prudent intentions and was almost as much annoyed at his own earnestness as at her carelessness.

He outstripped his prudent intention, however, many times after that night. The fact was she had for him, as for many another man, an irresistible attraction; whether by love or whether by a

strong interest he was drawn to her; when she talked earnestly on earnest things, as she would to him, but not to many besides, he was delighted with her eloquence and thought and admired her; when she passed into one of her bursts of indignation, or when, after her wont, she dashed off, charging helter-skelter at friend or foe who came in her way, mingling irony and frankness, follies and deep insights in her own odd fashion, he was struck with her brilliancy and still admired. As to liking her, it was impossible not to like Marion Raymond; one might almost say that it was impossible not to love her, that it was only a question of degree. Maurice's thermometer rose fast.

Marion had one especial gift: she talked the most wonderful nonsense, enthusiastically, con amore—nonsense with an underlying meaning subtle but perceptible and to herself always distinct, such rare nonsense as only thoughtful people can talk. Maurice appreciated it, and could even return it in kind; but, while she rejoiced him by the readiness with which she caught his

clue, he could not always lay sure hold on her's. The chameleon, as Durne still sometimes called her, changed colours too often for him, who was never very apt at reading women, to discriminate the varied lights that threw them. Durne had keener eyes.

"What trouble is it Mrs Raymond has had?" he asked Maurice once.

"Trouble? I don't know—I should say she had had no unusual trouble, except losing her husband so soon."

"Oh, I don't mean that, she has managed to survive him—a case of Christian fortitude again. But was it all right about her marriage?"

"I understood that it took place with the approval of everyone concerned."

"I'd take a bet she was a victim in the business. No doubt of it, she liked some one else."

"It wasn't in her to marry Raymond if she had liked some one else at the time; I know that much of her. However I don't fancy she cared much for him—she was very young too," he added like an apology.

"Sold, I haven't a doubt—persuaded into some pseudo heroineism about self-sacrifice. She would have been just the girl to be gulled that way, and have a little bitterness at herself, and I dare-say all the lot of them in the business, at the bottom of her heart all her life afterwards."

"What makes you imagine all this?" asked Maurice surprised.

"Odds and ends of talk; she lets out more than she knows when she isn't talking of herself—besides, she gives me the impression of a person who wouldn't be always happy in her quiet moments."

"Happy! why she seems one of the lightest-hearted creatures on the earth. Why her mood is never grave ten minutes together."

"Her mood, no. But women have fancies about their hearts."

It was the next day that Maurice asked, "Durne, can you seriously declare you think Marion Raymond unhappy?"

"I never said unhappy—but restless and dissatisfied, yes, certainly."

After that Maurice watched her more inquisitively; but the more he watched the less he saw. She threw diamond dust in his eyes, through which he knew her laughters and her mocking glances sparkling and quivering in all directions, and knew nothing more of her. If she spoke a sad word by chance a sudden jest plunged after it before there was time for answer, if she had talked thoughtfully for a little while she seemed all at once to grow weary and passed into levity and random flights. Then she would vex him by talking slightingly of the deep affections of life (which he was too large minded not to reverence), she would put absurd and prosaic interpretations on anything pretending to poetic meaning which came in her way, she would set romantic sentiments in a ludicrous light by quaint matter-of-fact explanations of her own—and alas for the unfortunate love ditty that fell under her criticism! And yet the earnestness and reality he had praised were in her not to be overlooked, her enthusiasms and her indignations had a genuine verve—even though many a quick rebuke fell on Durne for

speeches much such as she had always ready on her own lips to check her fervour abruptly when it seemed in its hottest career.

Her conduct to himself was a riddle which he vainly tried to solve. Generally she was simply friendly, but at times, when he spoke with a warmer meaning, there was a tenderness, half shrinking half longing, in her subdued manner that almost brought him to tell her outright that he loved her and solve the riddle, in perhaps the only way in which it was solvable, by giving it up and asking her for the answer. But always the next time they met after such a semi-crisis she was strange in her bearing towards him, haughty as if she had taken offence and almost quarrelsome; and at all times she was sure to resent the least thing which could be construed into an assumption on his part that she felt any interest in him beyond what was required by the friendship she frankly avowed.

And why, if she knew he cared for her and liked to have it so, should she be so eager to point out to his notice every new fair face, and take such

pains to have him introduced to every reigning belle in whom there could be a possible rival? Why especially did she so zealously manœuvre to throw Lesley Hawthorn in his way? Lesley Hawthorn who showed no consciousness of it but apparently took it for granted that he belonged to her friend.

No, Maurice could not make it out; for surely Marion was different to him from what she was to any other. So different that, with all his perplexity, he began to look on her as a kind of property, to think of her as "Marion." Once indeed, unawares, he called her Marion to her face: he was confused and shook an apology out of his teeth in an embarrassed way. "Oh don't mind," she said gently; "I liked it, it reminded me of my childhood." But when presently after he called her by her christian name a second time she drew herself up inquiringly, "I beg your pardon?"

"I beg your pardon," he said too, but in quite a different tone.

"I see," she said; "you thought I did not mind.

A *mistake* I did not; but a mistake and a disrespect are not the same thing."

In this way she seemed to keep him steadily at a distance. And yet the distance between them lessened palpably.

CHAPTER IV.

A FRIENDLY EVENING.

"LESLEY, do you know, my brother has come to Paris?" said Marion, one day as she sat near her friend in the little painting room at the Baudoyer's.

"Is he? I am glad," answered Lesley, brightly looking up from the sunny child face she was painting against her Iseult's knee; somehow Lesley's expression always shaped itself to the one she was tracing with her brush.

"Why are you glad? For my sake, I suppose; but I'm not sure that you need be."

Lesley looked inquiringly.

"Well, he *is* so good!" said Marion petulantly.

"Not such a *very* great objection, is it?" returned Lesley, laughing, "especially in a clergyman."

"Oh! you know what I mean well enough, tiresome girl, don't sit there laughing at me; he will lecture all my visitors about their worldliness and insist on my dressing in nothing but brown and grey."

"Why, are brown and grey better than the other colours?" asked Lesley, innocently.

Marion laughed. "You don't know about these things, you little ignorant philosopher. You go your own way and ask no questions of sects or schools. Don't you really know that there are degrees of piety in the different colours? But never mind that; just tell me how I am to listen to a perpetual condemnation of all my tastes, not to speak of my amusements, and keep as amiable as I ought."

Lesley looked puzzled. "But will he do that?"

"Will he not? You don't know the kind of thing I mean. You have taken your idea of an apostle from the Bible. We have self-elected apostles of

quite a different school—pious men who, for fear God's curse on the world at the fall wasn't enough, add their own and take all beauty and brightness out of their ill-starred disciples' lives."

"I know nothing of this," said Lesley, thoughtfully; "I think all beauty is God's."

"Yes, life and all the truth and beauty and gladness that are upon it are His; but these men would have it all the Evil One's, and tell us to go blind and deaf to them all, as if to rejoice were to sin. I believe they think laughter blasphemous."

Undismayed by the supposition, Lesley gave one of her musical little laughs. "How have they the power to vex you?" she answered; "you have your thoughts, they their's, that is all—only your own thoughts can affect you."

"Only my own thoughts can *guide* me, and their thoughts, if they would only not trouble me with them, are nothing to me, certainly, but when they go hammer, hammer, hammer, trying to knock them into all our brains, they do have the power of vexing;" chafed Marion. "And as to my brother, he quite bewilders me with the number of

new sins he has found out for me. Only think of my very studies being 'a hindrance to the work of grace!'"

"But you studied when you were a girl at home; how did he not tell you then what he thought?"

"He was rather different then," replied Marion, with almost a sneer; "he only wondered how I could bother my head with those beastly school-books, and teased me for being blue. He has only lately come to see the snare of studious and literary tastes—I suppose it was a blessed instinct that saved him from them before."

"Marion! you speak so—so bitterly almost. It is wrong surely?"

"Perhaps," said Marion, gravely. "Yet,"—"Oh Lesley!" she broke out in her impetuous way, "you don't know—I *did* love my brother in spite of all, I did much—I did wrong even, I tell you, for his sake, when everybody called him worthless, and it is hard to have him now, in his cold unloving way, reproving me out of his iceberg height of sanctity; I have but him on whom I have a

claim for love—and I have had no love in all my life!"

It sounded to Lesley like a cry of bitterness long pent up, torn out at last unawares. She threw her arms round her, "Dear Marion, then it is all coming to you now?"

"No," said Marion in a half sob.

"You believe mine, Marion?"

Marion kissed her; "Yes, darling, I trust *yours*."

"How ridiculous!" she exclaimed, almost without pause and with a suspicious glistening still in her eyes; "of all things in the world that I should be *poser*-ing *en femme incomprise*, the last part in the comedy to my taste—You be quiet, I won't be excused for crying for the moon; I might go doing it again, you know."

She put Lesley from her with a kiss and walked to the window. Lesley took up her brushes and made haste to be occupied. Presently Marion came back and sat down again quietly; "Lesley," she said in a matter-of-fact tone, "I know what you thought of just now; you had an inclination

to say Mr Maurice loved me. Well, I tell you that I know quite well that I could make him tell me so himself if I wished it—a little speaking low and drooping my eyelids at him and that kind of thing and it would be done. But I wouldn't have that: he doesn't love me—not what I understand by love, Lesley—I see farther into people than you do, and I tell you he doesn't. And it's all the better so. So don't make any mistake about that matter."

"No," said Lesley quietly, but surprised; to her it seemed unmistakeable that Maurice did love Marion.

For a long time the two worked silently, then Marion interrupted again, "I wish I had your gift, Lesley; you will always come with little scar or scathe out of *your* life troubles; you pass out of them into your art, and are all the richer at heart for the suffering—you have one life in you—and that the master life—that it can only strengthen, not kill."

"First of all, you have my gift, or nearly, you have artist talent if you would be patient: and

next, how do you know this of me? Who told you I had trouble?"

"First of all," returned Marion, "I haven't your gift, for my talent is a flighty one, and *won't* absorb me as yours does: and next, do you really suppose I have come to my time of life without being able to know by sympathy, or animal magnetism, or whatever it is, when a woman has got a sadness in her memory?"

Madame Baudoyer came into the room with a fidgetted look; "Well, my child, how do you get on?" she asked Lesley.

"Ah, Madam, I see what it is," said Marion, "you have come too look after us; you think we are chatterboxes."

"Well yes, Madame, I did hear the sound of voices and come with the purpose of preventing interruption to Desirée, I confess. You will excuse it, I trust. It is that. When we persuaded her not to go the expense of a studio of her own yet, we assured her she would be undisturbed here under our protection."

"I will be silent, Madame, you shall see how

good I will be," Marion promised; and so the talk came to an end.

Lesley had promised to spend part of that evening at Mrs Raymond's house. She often did so now. She used to leave her mother remorsefully, but Mrs Hawthorn was glad to have her go. "It is so much better for you, my child, and you come back with a bright face that does me good—you are growing quite strong again." Mrs Raymond at first used to try to persuade her to come too, but Mrs Hawthorn had been so many years an exile from drawing-rooms that she felt a nervous dislike to taking her place again there, a lady among people of her own class, and after the first time she prayed to be allowed to spend her evenings in her own home. "I have grown an old woman," she said, "and want my own arm-chair and early bed-time."

She *had* grown very old for her age; there was a great change in her since the spring.

When Lesley entered Mrs Raymond's drawing-room that evening she found there a tall stout personage in stiffly clerical attire. He looked

about forty (of which he wanted two or three years), he looked also as if he had never been younger. He had very thin mud-coloured hair, brushed over his head to hide a baldness at the summit, semicircular eyebrows which gave him an expression of weakness and conceit, and an unwholesome blotchy complexion—otherwise he was well enough off in the components from which facial pleasantness might have been produced, but, had these drawbacks not existed, the pinched sit of the lips and the unnatural composure of the whole visage were quite enough to mar the effect of the good features. He was well made and well dressed—altogether his appearance was that of a gentleman but a disagreeable one. Lesley knew at once that this was Marion's brother, though a handsome good-humoured looking young man who was chattering away to the pleased Violet looked much more what Marion's brother ought to have been. But he was hardly over twenty and did not look "good," according to Marion's interpretation of the word, by any means.

He was introduced to her as Mr Herbert Lesley, and in the course of the evening he informed her that his governor wouldn't let him come abroad by himself, so he had had to put up with that pr—ahem—he forgot he was Mrs Raymond's brother—*he* (nodding his head at the reverend man who had so narrowly escaped being called a prig) had come with him for travelling tutor, and they'd had a capital tour on the whole.

"Did he let you go to any of the theatres?" asked Lesley, who by this time had gathered that Herbert Lesley's travelling tutor considered most of the places to which young men are supposed to resort when they make foreign tours utter abominations.

"Yes," said Herbert, "because, you see, it was only to learn the language."

"But he said just now that theatres were the temples of Satan."

"Well, I *would* go, and my father meant me to, so we considered them only schools for learning German and Italian, you know. Balls were opportunities for studying foreign customs and improv-

ing oneself in foreign conversation—only I always asked English girls to dance—English always does come readiest to my tongue to talk to a partner in —and besides they were always the prettiest."

While he was speaking Marion had risen from her seat, flushing angrily; she moved impatiently to the piano at the far end of the room. Lesley followed her to turn over her music for her, but Maurice was there already. "I *can't* help it," Marion was saying to him hotly; "Ralph frets me terribly, and when I remember all, how even my marriage was for him—"

She stopped confused, Maurice's eyes were looking strangely into her's. Lesley came away from them quietly.

"Your marriage was for him?" repeated Maurice, slowly.

"Yes, for him:" said Marion, who felt that there was no going back from the position now, "that my mother might give him all and save him from ruin. It was very wrong, but I didn't understand it so then."

She spoke in a low tone but so distinctly that

Lesley, who sat nearest and whose ears were quick, felt called on to occupy Herbert Lesley's attention amain by talking with unusual vivacity, as he was evidently in no way disposed to listen to the oration against unprofitable talk which (in his tutor's most clerical tones) was edifying Miss Raymond.

"So," resumed Maurice, after a look and a pause, "it was through him I lost you."

"No:" she said; "long before."

"That foolish quarrel—and which of us can tell now what it was about?"

"You should know," she answered quietly; "you who made it a final one. But you lost me (I use your phrase, though it is hardly a true one), because you did not win me. See, we have said enough."

"And I *could* have won you?"

"What does it matter? Can I tell? Marion Raymond cannot answer questions about Marion Annesley."

"Can she answer questions about Marion Raymond?" asked Maurice's deepened voice.

Marion was still a moment. "Perhaps," she an-

swered very low, bending her head over an open music-book, as if she had found something that wanted deciphering there. Then, apparently afraid that that Perhaps had said too much, she went on lightly, "Though one's thousand and one discriminating acquaintances would say that is just what one should not undertake to do—they understand one so much better than one does oneself."

Perhaps Maurice would have asked her the question about Marion Raymond which had been in his mind but that just then he remembered Lesley's acute hearing and, looking to see what part of the room she might be in, discovered that neither she nor Herbert Lesley could be considered at an impossible distance for catching what was said. And certainly an unwitnessed interview would be preferable to this with its four too many.

"Then you don't believe in 'Oh wad some power the giftie gie's to see oursels as ithers see's?'" he said, imitating her careless tone.

"No," she answered sharply; "why should one care? The effect we produce on others isn't necessarily the reality in ourselves; seeing is a good

deal in the eyes that look—and then think of all the green spectacles!"

"Can we none of us see each other truly?"

"Those who look truly can, I suppose—how many are they, I wonder. Lesley, come and choose my song."

Herbert Lesley rose with a startled face—Marion laughed: "Did you think I was calling you, Mr Lesley? Miss Hawthorn's Christian name is Lesley."

"We ought to be cousins," said Herbert to his pretty namesake. "I wish we were."

"It is not an uncommon surname, I think," said Lesley, colouring.

"And I unfortunately have no relations in France," said Herbert, "or else I might put in a claim. I suppose you were christened so from some surname in your family."

"It was my mother's maiden name; but I think it is not an uncommon one at all," said Lesley.

Marion saw she did not like the discussion. "Choose me my song, chatterbox," she said, laughing. "I told Miss Raymond I would sing, half an hour ago, so there is no more time to lose."

Lesley gave her one of those love ditties which are the staple of drawing-room music; this one she liked for its simple plaintive melody. Marion, the great charm of whose singing was its quiet but dramatic emphasis and pathos, sang it utterly without expression, the music of an organ-grinder could hardly have been more mechanical; Lesley's face expressed her surprise.

"I can't sing those inane die-away love-songs," Marion said to her; "one might as well try to put expression into Hie diddle diddle, The Cat and the Fiddle, as into these meaningless rhymes."

"But this ballad is better than usual," said Maurice; "it is simple and touching enough."

"Oh, they are all like each other. I'll compose you one extempore just as good as any of them —to the same air if you like." And she sat down again at the piano and sang—

La la la la la la la heart,
La la la la la thee;
La la la la la la la part,
La la la la la me.

"There!" she said triumphantly, "it has as much

sense as the best of them and the same rhymes."

"I quite agree with my sister," said the Rev. Ralph Annesley, who, hearing what was going on, now joined the group at the piano, "as to the folly and idle tendencies of these secular compositions. I am glad to find she at last sees their vanity. She would find in the beautiful and varied Christian hymnologies and in the beautiful metrical version of the psalms—"

"Tate and Brady, sir?" quoth Herbert. "Very fine to be sure—only don't you think a *leetle* too old fashioned for drawing-room music? I shouldn't wish to say slow, but old-fashioned."

"Sir," said his tutor angrily, "if you can allow yourself to despise your religion as old-fashioned, you must be prepared to hear yourself with your *new*-fashioned views condemned at the judgment to ever—"

"Tate and Brady, sir, Tate and Brady," again interrupted the impenitent pupil, "the doggerelized psalms in the Prayer Book, you know, not the Articles. Oh no! I didn't mean the Articles."

"Let me, as a believer, warn you, my misguided

and unbelieving fellow-creature, that for the scoffers is prepared everlasting fire with the—"

"There are ladies in the room, sir," interposed Herbert, with pretended horror; his great delight was to cut short his tutor's homilies.

Marion turned to her brother, "Ralph, I don't like this sort of discussion; you can continue it with Mr Lesley at your own hotel, or anywhere you both like, but not here, please."

"Ah, Marion," sighed Ralph, "I fear you will find the trifling and worldly conversations you prefer will darken your soul to spiritual things."

Marion shrugged her shoulders impatiently: Miss Raymond took her part: "I am sure, Mr Annesley, you mistake Marion; she is the last person in the world to object to religious conversation; it was only the squabbling, you know—at least, I mean, you and Mr Lesley didn't seem quite to understand each other."

Marion had added, in an irresistible half aside, to Miss Raymond's "only the squabbling," "and the irreverence." It was to her Mr Annesley addressed his reply.

"Irreverence do you call it, to talk of high and heavenly things as I do, instead of the sinful talk of a vain and lost world? Oh lost and misguided soul! how little you know of the happiness of the saved in such blessed conversation."

Herbert began: "Well, but as it don't give *us* any particular happiness but quite the other way, now isn't it rather selfish?"—

Marion's voice rising clear and full in "Adelaide" stopped his speech.

Maurice had taken no part in this conversation. Sitting absorbed in his own thoughts he could hardly have been called even a listener, and when Lesley, who was following it amused and puzzled, had asked him, sotto voce, "What does Mr Annesley mean, exactly, when he says *world* and *worldly?* It seems as if they had some almost technical meaning," he had answered her, "Pragmatical ass!" and, walking to the fireplace, had left her to apply the epithet to herself or to the reverend Ralph as she thought applicable and to fret herself with the idea that Maurice, whose courtesy and gentleness to her had hitherto been

unfailing, must in that short tête-à-tête by the piano have met with some too harsh rebuff from his lady-love. But when, on Mrs Raymond's declaring her intention of going to the ball at the Hotel de Ville that night with Lady Leonora Hurst, her brother took occasion to denounce her wicked practices and to predict a very undesirable final destination for her if she persevered in her guilty design, he found an unexpected and most unmanageable antagonist. Maurice, with a coolness savouring disagreeably of contempt, tossed him backwards and forwards on the points of his own arguments, with masterly logic drew him, struggling feebly for a standing-place, from question to question; and, having prostrated him with the weight of his immeasurably superior intellect and learning, left him floundering hopelessly in unknown depths and inwardly determined to keep clear for the future of such an unpleasant opponent. Marion coming back, freshly draped in a cloud of white film, after half an hour's absence, found the reverend Ralph unprepared with a protest. She smiled approvingly on her champion.

"Are *you* going?" she asked, sure of an affirmative answer.

But Maurice was not going; he was lazy to-night, he *had* told Durne he should go, but he had changed his mind; he had letters to write and should get through them and then take the luxury of a good night's rest.

Marion turned from him half pettishly: "You are quite right not to go, I am sure, if it has no attractions for you." And for the rest of the time she seemed to avoid talking to him.

There was no appearance of her missing him at the Hotel de Ville. As Durne told him next day, he had never seen Mrs Raymond more animated, and no belle of that evening was so followed and flattered as she, or seemed more thoroughly to enjoy her queendom.

Maurice in his secret heart could have wished her less pleasure in her ball. The remainder of his own evening had not passed so satisfactorily, and his correspondents received but curt and uninteresting epistles bearing that date. "When does Mrs Raymond not enjoy herself?" he said

laughing, "and the atmosphere of a ball-room is her very element."

But Marion, in parting with Lesley, had said, "I would rather be you, Mrs Demuret, going back to your quiet and your mother that loves you so."

"You would tire of the quiet for always, Marion."

"Perhaps, but I feel quiet just now—I shan't enjoy myself in a whirl."

"Will you not! I know better. And this is the lady who wants to chaperon me out of my quiet into the whirl!" Lesley had answered laughingly, "Not enjoy herself!"

"Well of course I shall when it comes to it," Marion had admitted. "But," she had added, "I wish you were to be with me. Violet is not exactly a companion and one does want a real one."

"By-and-by," said Lesley, "by-and-by—when the picture is finished you know." So they had gone their different ways as such different lots as theirs would needs have it.

When Lesley, stepping out of her cab at the door of the house in which was her home, turned to speak to the man-servant Marion had sent in charge of her, whose was that fevered face that flashed upon her and whose the hand that tried to arrest her flight and the voice that cried, "One moment, one moment, for the love of Heaven?"

She hurried past, quickly up the stairs and out of sight. Presently she was clinging to her mother, pale and breathless.

"Oh dear mother, I have seen him—the man that has been following me. It is Louis."

Mrs Hawthorn started. Only the day before Lesley had told her, on Paul de l'Aubonne's authority, that Louis was at home in the South, not likely to leave it till his marriage should have taken place. "My child," she urged, "you have fancied it: this man you have seen following you has made you uneasy; in your agitation you have imagined some other person to be Louis."

"No, I have not imagined; I tell thee I saw Louis; he spoke to me."

Poor Mrs Hawthorn had perplexed thoughts

that restless night. If Lesley's excitable fancy had not deceived her and this really was Louis de l'Aubonne come back in this strange way, what was to be done? Should she take flight with her daughter and hide her in England from his pursuit—no, not in England, there Lesley was surely his wife, but in some distant place, anywhere so that it were out of his way? No, that would destroy Lesley's artist prospects; she was making a name now; she could not afford to sacrifice the opportunity. Should she claim the protection of the law? should she complain to his family, to his bride-elect? Or had he perhaps come to offer to set Lesley in her place, and would Lesley listen to him and be his wife?—and was that what she ought to do?

Oh dear! oh dear! was there no one to advise them?

"Do not perplex thyself, little mother," Lesley had said caressingly to her, when she saw her beginning to distress herself with doubts and varying plans. "We cannot foresee his conduct but we have but to be firm; he has no power.

And I do not think so ill of him as to fear him. Why should we fly?"

And Mrs Hawthorn, as usual, trusted to her daughter, and was something comforted by her self-reliance: but still—

CHAPTER V.

STEPHANIE TO THE RESCUE.

CASIMIR DE L'AUBONNE had won that race I spoke of, that race to the black goal of death, but Victor de Fourrère was not left far behind. He knew it when he heard that his old friend was gone. "Very good," he said, "with the life he has lived it is only strange that he lasted so long. But my time must be near too; it is impossible that I should have long to go on; I am a good deal older than he was." So Stephanie had to read him two portions a day instead of one, and the old man began to speak gently to her, "You will be a good wife, child," he used to say to her. "Ah! I have done well for my godson, Master Louis." Stephanie would thank him for his good opinion, promise she would deserve it, and read on.

He died on the last day of the old year—soon enough after M. de l'Aubonne père to make no difference to the time of Louis's marriage, as Mde. de la Chatellerie said, for, as he was not a relation the necessary delay on account of the first death would still cover that for the second. But it was, as she farther remarked, a good thing that it had not happened some months ago, for then Louis would have been left at liberty to marry that young person with whom he had entangled himself.

Stephanie overheard this and was pained; she had begun to forget that she had been forced upon Louis, and this was a particularly disagreeable reminder—for would he not come to hate her now that, but for his engagement to her, he could have followed his own lover's choice, secure in his new wealth and in his position of head of his family, with no consent to ask but his gentle mother's? However she consoled herself by remembering that he had ceased to think of the English girl and that in marrying herself he in prospective more than doubled his fortune—and in the mean-

time her dowry was no trifling one. These things Louis also said to himself, and matters remained as they were.

But in a little while Stephanie, who was sentimental, began to think how noble it would be on her part to set him free—she might bid him go and seek that girl again and judge between them—she might tell him this and this—a hundred appropriate speeches flitted through her mind. And then if he should answer, "That girl is nothing to me, I have learned to value you and I will not be set free," the only change would be that he would honour her for what she had done and would treat her the more tenderly when she was his wife: and if not—why still it would be better (provided that her parents did not find out what she had done) that she should have given him her leave to go, for he would certainly hate her if he felt that she was the obstacle to his wishes, and then how miserable her life with him would be. So she pondered until at length it came to her as a necessity that she should offer to release him from his pledge to her.

Stephanie had never been a disobedient child and she was appalled when she found herself actually sitting down to write her clandestine letter, so utterly in opposition to her parents' designs. Before she had gone far she threw down her pen, and took up the sheet on which the evidence of her crime was still wet, with a momentary intention of throwing it into the fire. But she read what she had written and she thought it had a generous tone and did her credit, and she relapsed into heroism and went on. This was the letter she wrote:—

"MONSIEUR,

You will, without doubt, be surprised at receiving a letter with the signature of Stephanie de la Chatellerie, but I hope that you will consider that the relations in which we stand at this moment excuse in me a step which would otherwise be too injurious to your respect for me. I hope also that you will appreciate the motives with which I make you the proposition which you will presently read. I am about, Monsieur, to offer you your freedom; I wish to release you from

the engagement into which you have entered with me. I have considered that the death of M. de Fourrère leaves you, but for that engagement, in a position to follow the dictates of your own heart (for I know Mde. de l'Aubonne will concede whatever you desire), free to return, if you wish it, under more favourable circumstances, to your former and once unfortunate love. Alas! how unhappy I should be to imagine that you did wish it and were withheld on my account! Do not permit, I pray you, such a consideration to restrain you. Regard yourself, I implore it, as wholly free so far as I am concerned. It is true that, should you form some other engagement, it would be necessary to offer some plausible excuses to my parents, for, I confess it, I shall not dare to own to them that the union into which I was about to enter in obedience to their desires has been hindered by my own act. Nevertheless I do not doubt that you will find some honourable manner of executing this necessity, and I assure you on my part that you may accept the release I offer you without in the least lessening the friendship and high con-

sideration—shall I say it? yes, you will understand me and see no forwardness in the expression—the affection, which, since the circumstances in which we were placed have brought us into a certain intimacy, have grown for you in my heart.

"Receive, I pray you, the assurance of the continued regard and of the wishes for your happiness of

MARIE STEPHANIE DE LA CHATELLERIE."

Louis read this letter in bewilderment; it was so unexpected, that at first he scarcely perceived its meaning; he got to the end of it without being much clearer on the point. Then he began it again and, as he read, speculated on Stephanie's secret motives—was there some better match in prospect for her, and was this a device of her mother's for retreating from the engagement with him under fair colours? Or was Stephanie herself unfavourable to him and secretly anxious that he should leave her to some more acceptable suitor? Stephanie was but a common-place young person and Louis had lately felt a little weary of her, but at the idea of her being taken from him he grew

chafed and unhappy: he threw the letter from him and paced angrily up and down the room. But, as he walked, his former impression of her love for him revived and, remembering how they had talked together about his unhappy passion and how she had pitied him and been indignant at his wrongs, he began to think, "No, it cannot be from indifference that she is so ready to part from me; it is a generous fancy which has seized her. If I were to profit by it, presently she would overwhelm me with the reproaches of betrayed love." In this mood he re-read the letter—Yes, it was so, its coldness was only the necessary reserve of a prudent and modest young lady. Stephanie was fulfilling what she conceived to be a duty, but she did not urge him to leave her. Decidedly she loved him.

"There is something in that little Stephanie after all," he said, as he refolded her letter. "Poor child, if she were but a little less clumsy looking!"

He did not intend on any pretence to break off his engagement with her: his sense of honour forbad it. Truly, he had thought more than once

in these latter days that Fortune had been unamiable to him in the matter of M. de Fourrère's death—if it had been but a few months earlier or if only he could have foreseen its date and temporized a little, his lost Desirée the only woman whom he would have chosen for wife, might not have been his *lost* Desirée, but still his gentle trustful love—a little later his acknowledged bride. But all that, he considered, was of the past, though Desirée had left him no love for any one else; that passion had gone, passed out of his life, and left him tired and lonely, glad to rest on the affection of his homely bride elect. And besides, come what would, he belonged to Stephanie now—if Desirée herself, if some new love as dear as she had been, were to call him, still he belonged to Stephanie; he would have no second stain on his faith, no more self-reproach. And he honestly meant to be a good friend and guardian of this dowdy little body whom he had accepted at the hands of her family and his: besides which it was quite true that he had a certain amount of affection for her, though it was fluctuating.

He did not answer what she wrote by writing—she could not have received his letter without her mother's inspection—but he contrived a tête-à-tête with her on the first opportunity. She was nervous and embarrassed: he determined to bring the discussion to one plain question which she must answer.

"Then, Stephanie, do you really wish, for your own sake, that our union should be prevented?"

"No," she answered, simply. "Why should I?"

"You do not wish to be yourself free to form some new engagement?"

"No," she said, "How would that benefit me? I do not think that my parents would choose so agreeably to me a second time. For you know they desire wealth and a fitting position, in the first place, as to their son-in-law?"

Still he had not the distinct answer he wished, he tried again: "You are contented now then, Stephanie?"

"Yes," she said, with the old droop of her eyelids and the quick flush that always pleased Louis, who liked to think he had moved her.

"Then *I* am more than contented."

"But," she said, after a moment's hesitation, "listen to me: I think you imagine it necessary to refuse my proposal for my sake. You do not understand that young ladies of our society, carefully brought up, do not—I mean that this would be the same as if my parents were to tell me not to think of you for the future as my betrothed—one is sorry, but it would not be like your grief when *she* left you."

"In short, Mademoiselle, I am not to flatter myself that you would regret me," said Louis, bitterly.

"It is not that," she replied gently; "but you know that you do not love me as you loved her before; and if perhaps you still love her (and also her claim is perhaps before mine, that is, if you are not mistaken in judging her too leniently) and if it touches your happiness still so nearly, then you might return to her without being afraid of—I mean only that for me it would not matter so much."

Louis caught her hand and kissed it. "You are

an angel!" he exclaimed, "you think only of me. Yes, you are more generous than she, you are more worthy of my love. I will not leave you unless you drive me from you." He drew her to him as he spoke.

"But remember you are still free; I give you still three days to decide," were Stephanie's parting words, as she escaped from him to hasten to her own room, there to recover from her confusion before her mother, whose step was already heard nearing the opposite door of the library from that by which she fled from it, should scan her with her keen cold eyes.

Louis went home that evening well pleased with himself and with Stephanie. As he rode, he rehearsed in his memory the little scene between them, and the only thing he regretted was her last words—it was as if they made the question remain unsettled. If he could have seen her alone he would have turned back to refuse the three days she had given him for decision and to tell her, for the second and final time, that he would not leave her. But, after all, even Louis's impatience

admitted that three days' length was no terrible suspense in a case where the decision was already virtually made and accepted: he began to arrange the scene of its declaration—he could sketch out Stephanie's part in it, almost as certainly as his own. Louis always enjoyed any little dramatic interlude in which he was an actor, and this anticipation inspirited him.

He would have liked to see his mother when he got home; it would be pleasant to hear her thank him for doing what was so consonant to her wishes, and he was excited and willing to talk freely. But she had gone to bed indisposed, and he had no sufficient excuse to justify to himself the selfishness of disturbing her.

It was always depressing to Louis to be alone; he had from boyhood been prone to a fitful melancholy, which had increased on him in the last few months, and his thoughts, left to their own current unbroken by the presence of a companion, inevitably took a moody tinge. A warm fire blazed in the salon when he entered it, but, excepting for the glow which played over the hearth, the

large apartment was only lit by a cold grey glimmer from the sky where the moon was just rising under a veil of cloud. The servants did not bring lights and it did not occur to him to ring for them; he sat down, dull and dissatisfied, and fell into one of his gloomy reveries. He had ridden fast and was tired; in a little while a drowsiness crept over him and he leaned back in his easy chair, half conscious of his slumber but dreaming uneasily a series of impossible predicaments in which Desirée and Stephanie were somehow mixed up and were in the most uncomfortable way one and the same person, yet perpetually changing identity. At last he awakened suddenly, positive that, with that kind of consciousness sleepers so often have, he had been aware of Desirée's coming near him and passing to a seat behind him out of sight. It was that which had awakened him and he felt that she was sitting there now, but the stupor of sleep was still heavy on him and he could not rouse himself to look: he dozed again for half a minute and then again unclosing his leaden eye-

lids was certain of her waiting still in the same place. At length he shook off his lethargy with an effort and, rising out of his arm-chair, turned towards her.

There was no one there, the low couch where he had imagined her was empty. With a strange dread, as if his hand might be arrested in the act, he went up to it and touched it. Nothing there, yet he could have sworn that she had entered stealthily and seated herself near him while he slept, as his mother had so often done.

The moon was shining full into the room now. As he faced the window, going back to his seat, he seemed to see the light gathered into her face looking at him. He covered his eyes with his hands; when he looked again he only saw the long moon-beams streaming in. "Imbecile!" he muttered to himself angrily; he knew it must be his own agitation that had produced the apparition. But the strangeness of that sense of her presence he could not explain to his mind so easily.

In the night he dreamed that he was sitting again by the fire in the half-dusk salon, a

voice aroused him calling "Louis, oh Louis, come to me, or I die." It was Desirée's voice, and Desirée was standing at the window in the moonlight—a shimmering figure in white (the bridal dress in which he had seen her last) and a pale face with earnest eyes bent on him. She was beckoning him: he moved towards her, and as he advanced she seemed to fade back and back. When he got to the window she had passed somehow beyond it; he saw the figure floating into the silver clouds, still beckoning, and heard again but more faintly the call, "Come to me, Louis, or I die." He tried to answer but his voice was stifled, his throat was on fire, he seemed to have lost the power of utterance.

He must have brought forth some sound, however, for he was awakened by his mother's voice, "Art thou ill, my son? I heard thee cry out."

"No, I am well, I did not call. Go back, my good mother, thou art shivering in the cold, thou wilt be ill to-morrow. Go back, it is nothing. I was only dreaming that I answered some one who called me."

"Sleep better, then. God bless thee, my Louis."

"I shall sleep the more calmly for that blessing," murmured Louis to the retreating form.

After that his dreams were more natural, but still of Lesley Hawthorn—His mother brought her to him—they were together as they used to be—they were reconciled. When François his valet disturbed him the next morning, he had just been telling her he had had a troubled dream, a delusion, as if something had made them part on ill terms; she was looking at him with tender reproach, he was just stooping to kiss her parted lips.

"It is much pleasanter asleep," he grumbled, as he began his toilet.

He saw Stephanie that day; he thought she looked plainer than usual, and found her conversation entirely uninteresting. He was absent too and made inappropriate answers, and while they were laughing at them he was listening in a daze to the voice out of his dream "Come to me, Louis, or I die," or dwelling on the fond fancies of the night as if they had really been. He went home to feed on them in his memory, calling them back

one after the other, fixing them in the lover's long Present. The three days made a very short time now, for when they were over he should belong again to Stephanie: now at least he might forget his bondage and luxuriate in this renewal of life to his so long numbed heart.

So the next two days he took holiday and dreamed. As to the decision he did not think of it; it had been made when he entered into the engagement with Stephanie and her parents; it was too late to change it. Only, as he extinguished his light on the last night, he thought "That feeling of her presence was no mere fancy. If she were to call me again this last night what would that mean?"

She did call him again; she came to the foot of his bed and stood there, her face pale and wet with tears, saying to some one, "It is in vain, he will not listen to me." And then she called "Louis, Louis," and said again to some one, "I am his wife, but he does not think of that." Then her face changed and she was Stephanie with all her features distorted and a hideous mocking expression

on them. And then it was Lesley again, showing him an immense wedding ring loose on her thin finger and repeating in a shrill voice as if she were singing, "I am your wife, come back to me, or I die."

He awoke with the words ringing in his ears. The great clock of the chateau was striking six, the sound blended with his dream and seemed like a funeral knell, the darkness troubled him. He rang violently, François came all in amaze, and grumbling between his teeth at being disturbed out of his comfortable slumbers at so unseasonable an hour on a cold morning: it did not appease his discontent to learn that his master had forgotten why he summoned him, nor to be recalled to hear that he chose to get up at once, and to have, in consequence, to give up all hope of a pleasant relapse into the sluggard's luxury, a morning nap. "He is mad—a dangerous madman!" François exclaimed to the candles and repeated to the jug of hot water; "I always expected it, always; but this form of it is disagreeable."

Louis wrote two long letters this morning, but

each of them, when it should have been sealed and addressed to Mademoiselle Mlle. de la Chatellerie, went flying into the fire. Another, half written and, unlike the others, so far carefully pondered, shared their fate. Anxious as he was now to avoid that little dramatic interlude to which he had looked forward, and although he had little time to study a new part and laboured besides under the disadvantage of real excitement, nevertheless, since, even to have an opportunity of giving her a letter, he must see her and talk with her, it was better to trust all to the interview: he would not write.

He met her taking her morning walk, under the escort of her *bonne*, on the road by which he came. He dismounted and walked by her, leading his docile horse; Fanchon considerately lagged behind—she was accustomed to the manœuvre, for her young mistress and her betrothed had had their little private meetings in this way before to-day.

"Mademoiselle"—began Louis, preparing to plunge into the subject, the moment the servant was out of ear reach.

"Mademoiselle"—he began again, and there he stopped short.

Stephanie looked perplexed, she wanted to help him on but she was not quickwitted and could not see her way to do it—unless by a direct question, which she did not know how to phrase.

They walked on: Stephanie gave a little cough.

"You are not *souffrante,* Mademoiselle?" asked Louis with interest—was the girl already drooping on his account? She looked pale, he thought.

"Not the least in the world," she said; and there was another pause.

At last Louis continued the conversation from her last answer, "I, Mademoiselle, cannot speak so cheerfully; I have gone through much since I saw you; I have been in doubt and in trouble."

"What has happened?" she asked, surprised.

"Happened? nothing. It would better that something should have happened, if it had been my death."

"What is it? What do you mean?" Stephanie was alarmed.

"I mean that I am a dishonoured man—that I

am compelled, yes *compelled*, to break faith with you. You will hate and despise me—"

"No," she said, interrupting him. "Let us understand each other. If you are going to accept a freedom which I offer you I do not see that I could reproach you."

Her quietness calmed him. "You are right," he said; "I offer you a disrespect when I speak as if I were deserting you. But only four days ago I told you that I could not leave you unless you drove me away—and now everything seems changed!" And he told her in an incoherent manner, his excitement again mastering him, the history of those intervening days.

"Unless you insist on it for your own happiness," he said finally, "I do not ask that the tie between us should be broken yet—let it remain dear generous Stephanie, let me still think I have a claim to your interest. I will only seek her, unknown to any one but yourself, and if I find her happy and forgetful of me—Ah! mon Dieu!" He covered his face and turned away abruptly.

Stephánie began to weep for pity. "Listen," she

said, finding that after all she was the best able of the two to decide the affair. "Let it be as you have said; I will keep the secret. Go and seek her, free to do as you may find. We will seem to make no difference for the present, afterwards we shall see what is to be done."

"Too generous!" he gasped out. "But I cannot—in justice to you—I cannot."

"It is best for me thus. Only, out of consideration for me, let no one know of it, for if—I mean if you found it different—if nothing were to be changed finally in our relations to each other,—it would be better, you understand, that others should not talk. And then my parents!" Stephanie grew white and red by turns, thinking of the result of their knowing of this somewhat unusual arrangement of her's; it was only when she thought of them that its objectionableness struck her.

Louis walked on, still in breathless agitation, Stephanie kept giving uneasy glances behind—would Fanchon not perceive that there was something going on?—and if she were to gossip

about it to the other servants and set conjecture afoot! Presently her handkerchief fell from her uncareful hand, in her flurry she would never have noticed it, but Louis's horse did and, as the wind puffed it under his feet, started and sprang aside. Stephanie screamed, Fanchon came hurrying up to see what had happened.

"If Monsieur were to ride on," suggested she. "That beast is perhaps tired of going slowly and that makes him so cross. And we are quite near the house too."

Stephanie could have kissed her for the proposal. Louis, seeing its wisdom, made haste to adopt it, and in a little while he and Stephanie greeted each other in Mde. de la Chatellerie's boudoir as if they were meeting for the first time that day.

Afterwards it was only to declare that business called him to Bourdeaux, to make his formal adieux, and to hasten home to reconcile his mother to his sudden departure.

Of course he went not to Bourdeaux but to Paris, and alone, for he suspected François's babbling.

And it *was* he whom Lesley had seen as she got out of the cab and whom she had for two days discovered following her from afar.

He had sought for her where she lived when he first knew her. The Hawthorns were gone thence; the porter and his wife, themselves new comers, could give no information about them, and he concluded that they had wanted to hide from pursuit of his; for he had no suspicion of the young artist's improving position—it was not as an artist that he had ever thought of her, so that that possibility did not occur to his mind. If he had known that they had only moved into a home more comfortable and more aspiring than the first but still, for Lesley's convenience in going to the Baudoyers, not very far off, some of his wanderings might have been spared; but as it was, not daring to inquire for her at the old master's studio, to which his thoughts next turned, lest Pierre, who had correspondents in his neighbourhood, should give the alarm there, and fearing observation, he roamed about the near-lying streets to the Rue de Gougeon, hoping that he

should thus catch a glimpse of her and be able to overtake her or at least to track her home.

But Lesley's passings to and from the Baudoyer studio were not so regular as they had been, and he, although at last he did catch sight of her from afar, could not time his walks so as to attain his next object. He had been on the watch two or three days before he found himself following her near enough to have any chance of success; that time he tracked her nearly to the goal, but as he was gaining on her she turned down in an arcade passage at the farther end of which he had just time to see a bearded man (in whom he did not recognize Maurice) hand her into a carriage where a grey silk dress was already sitting, and she was lost to him for the day. The next day he followed her with more success and was in time to make sure of the street in which she had disappeared, but not of the house; well, he would watch till nightfall to see if she came out again. He found a little café, and here he took up his post, pretty well worn out by this time with the

last few days' chase, under the excitement of which he had become more and more passionately bent on recovering his lost love. Evening darkened and the streets blazed out with defiant lights and still he had waited in vain: he might as well go now, there could be no chance of seeing her again till to-morrow, yet he could not bear to give up the watch. And at last she came out from a house a little way up the street, attended by a dapper maid in lavender cap ribbons. He rushed after them; he made sure that it really was Desirée and no other—and then before he could overtake them he saw a cab draw up by the pavement—Desirée was gone again. The dapper maid walked demurely back and had re-entered the house before he could make up his mind as to the policy of accosting her.

He had paced up and down opposite the house for more than two hours, encouraged by a momentary glimpse of a face like Mrs Hawthorn's in the newly lighted room before the servant drew down the blinds—paced up and down, up and down, waiting in the raw night air to make

sure if this were indeed her home, to get one look into her face, to speak to her perhaps—yes, perhaps to hear her startled cry of love and welcome and go in with her to win her back at once and for ever. And when she came she would not so much as look at him, she fled from him as if he had been a midnight robber! Louis went back to his out-of-the-way hotel with a sick and hopeless heart.

CHAPTER VI.

A USELESS INTERVIEW.

"He has been here," Mrs Hawthorn said to her daughter when she came in the next day from her master's studio, whither she had purposely gone at an early hour. "He came soon after you were gone, and, poor young man, he really has made my heart ache."

"As he has made it ache before for me," said Lesley gravely. "What didst thou tell him, little mother?"

"Well, I hardly knew what to tell him. I pointed out the impossibility of your allowing him to renew his visits under the circumstances; and of course I spoke of the terrible wrong he had done you. He said he had come to repair it, and implored me to be his friend."

"Repair it! Can he repair it?"

"Well, he said he was independent now and explained that he would marry you in the most public way possible—"

"Mother!" interrupted Lesley reproachfully, "didst thou let him talk of marrying me?"

"Well," returned Mrs Hawthorn pettishly, "I did the best I could. How was I to manage a young man raving and tearing about the room like a madman? And, as he said, when I objected—for I did tell him it could never be—*you* are the person to decide. I could but leave it to you."

"Then I must see him?"

"To tell you the truth I don't think he will give you any choice. I am sorry, my child—I told him that it would distress you if he came, but he said he *would* come, nothing should prevent him. I could do nothing with him."

"Very well," answered the girl quietly, but growing very pale, "I must be ready for him."

She went into her room and staid long enough to make her mother anxious. Mrs Hawthorn stole

quietly after her; she came away still more quietly when she found her kneeling, with upturned face by her bed. But before very long she had to summon her: Louis de l'Aubonne had come. "I will come," said Lesley calmly. "If thou couldst unsnap this chain for me—my hand shakes a little."

Mrs Hawthorn felt how cold she was, as she touched the soft white neck in unclasping the chain. "My poor child," she said, "you are not strong enough for this; let me tell him to-morrow will do better."

"No, tell him I will come now. Thou needst not be afraid for me, dear mother."

When Lesley entered the room where he was eagerly awaiting her, Louis saw at a glance that this was not the timid caressant child whose love he had won for the willing; this still, young creature, with her quiet dignity, had passed beyond his despotisms and his coaxings, he could not condescend to her as he did to Stephanie, he could not affect a fond tyranny as he had done with the former Desirée. This second Desirée,

more beautiful than the first, like her but different, with the coquettish grace gone from her manner and the once latent pride developed as a power and a self-preservation, was strange to him and abashed him.

So much so that, excepting for his exclamation stifled by something like a sob, "Desirée!" she was the first to speak.

"I hardly thought that Monsieur de l'Aubonne could wish to see me again."

"Oh Heaven! see you again!—for days it has been my only wish—like a madness, do you understand? my one thought. I have wandered to and fro seeking you in vain till I am ill with fatigue and grief."

"I do not know why I was so difficult to find. I had not hidden myself," said Lesley. "And why have you sought me?"

"Because I could no longer live without it, because you called me, because—"

"I called you, Monsieur! Oh! no. I knew that it was better we should never meet again. Oh, no, I would not have had you come."

"But your voice haunted me in the night, I saw you always—not cold and impassable as you are now, but with love in your eyes, weeping and asking for me because you were my wife."

Lesley started and put something on the table hastily, as if it burned her hand.

"Then—" she began.

But Louis seized her hand; "Yes, it is true, you are my wife, nothing can undo the vows we spoke before God. I come to claim you, to ask you to be wholly mine, Desirée!"

Poor girl, how she trembled.

"Desirée!"

"Oh let go my hand," she pleaded.

"Tell me first that you forgive me, that you are mine again."

"Ah," she said with partially recovered composure, "I have forgiven you long and long. It was true when I first said it to you, and *that* has not changed. But the other cannot be, ought not to be."

"It can be, if you forgive, it can be."

"Never. I have not trust in you now."

It was as if she had struck him; he grew white and staggered back to lean against the table. Yet why should he expect her to trust him?

She pointed to a chair near him. "Let us sit down. Unless you will go, which would be better."

"I *cannot* go. Oh, hear me!"

She bowed her head in assent. But Louis seemed struck dumb. In fact, what had he to say?

At last Lesley herself broke the pause; she stood before him with her quiet attitude and her grave face.

"Let *me* speak then, Monsieur. You have come here to-day in excitement, not thinking what you do. An old dream has come back to you—it was but a dream at the best, or *that* never would have happened. But you come to me under its reviving influence, in the fancy that we can put time back and be as we were. You do not know me,—you do not know yourself even. Even if it could be as you wish it at present, you would soon regret it; if you did not feel that it was a wrong done to Mlle. de la Chatellerie, you would remember that you were making the sacrifice of her for-

tune. And I cannot forget that you have that tie now."

"I am free—she will tell you herself if you desire it—she releases me because she knows I have no hope in life but to regain you. And what is her fortune to me? I am rich now, I am my own master, I want only you."

"It cannot be. Oh it cannot be!" Lesley stood clasping her hands.

"It *shall* be—dare you kill me?" Then he changed his tone. "Oh Desirée, do you then hate me? Speak, do you hate me?"

"No," she answered in a low voice, "I have never hated you."

Something, an impalpable something, in her manner encouraged him: he sprang to her side, "You love me still! Oh, yes, you love me, I knew it, I knew it was not in your nature to forget such a love as ours once was, I knew that when I came back to you broken with remorse, yearning to repair my fault, seeing in life only one hope, you would not refuse me that hope. Yes, you are constant, I knew it—Tell me it is so."

Lesley had drooped her head and sat motionless, as if stupefied by his vehemence.

"Tell me it is so," he repeated, losing confidence again as she still remained silent.

"No," she answered without moving; "it cannot be."

Then he pleaded passionately, eloquently, with a wild pathos that moved Mrs Hawthorn to tears. Lesley's face was hidden in her hands; she only murmured from time to time, "Oh, leave me: it cannot be."

"Oh, Louis, pray go now," urged Mrs Hawthorn—in her agitation she forgot that he was no longer Louis to her. "Pray go. No good can come of this, and you are making her ill."

"I will not go till she has answered me, till she has promised—"

"I have answered," said Lesley. "Mother, mother, speak for me," and she burst into convulsive weeping.

But what was Mrs Hawthorn to say? For she had a secret conviction that Lesley would not be able ultimately to resist her lover's insistance,

and in her own mind she thought that, if the young man really was penitent and still so passionately attached to her, it might be just as well that she should not. At the same time, her own sense of dignity and her fear of her daughter's remonstrances forbade her to coax him away by holding out that prospect. She hesitated, began a few vague phrases, hesitated, began again, and if Louis did not understand what she meant, it was no wonder, since she did not herself—excepting that she wanted him to go.

"Monsieur de l'Aubonne," said Lesley, with a strong effort for self-control, "I beg you to go. If you have the slightest consideration for me, you will not distress me longer."

"At any rate you will allow me to retire," she said, rising and going towards the door of the inner room, as she saw that he still lingered.

"You will excuse me then: I must follow my daughter, I am afraid she may suffer from this agitation," said Mrs Hawthorn hurriedly, afraid of being left alone with this unmanageable suitor.

So Louis found there was nothing for it but

to go, and muttering something about seeing them again, went out gloomily to hide in his hotel, moaning and maundering disturbed soliloquies, and torturing himself with alternate hope and despair.

But Lesley, pale and chill but composed, sat elaborating a sketch for a new picture that evening until, absorbed in her artist being, she almost forgot the dull ache at her heart which was *her* reminder of that painful interview.

Mrs Hawthorn fidgetted over her knitting; the evening wore away slowly, she looked at the clock every quarter of an hour, and wondered that the minute-hand had got no farther in the interval. At last Lesley laid down her crayon, "I am tired —I will go to bed."

"Do, my dear, it is much the best for you; I am sure I shall be very glad to be in bed too," said Mrs Hawthorn, stooping to pick up the knitting pin which had dropped from her hand in her flurry at being suddenly addressed. "Why! what is this on the ground? Can it be your one, Lesley?"

Lesley looked distressed; "Oh! I meant to return it. How could I forget? I took it off the chain on purpose. And I was so anxious he should have it back! It is a foolish fancy I know, but I never shall feel free till that ring is given back to him."

She took it from her mother's hand gingerly, as if its touch gave her pain. Lesley always had been fanciful, and it was to her as if this wedding-ring were a talisman that gave Louis de l'Aubonne power over her; she could not feel her independence of this man whom she had called husband whilst the token which he had placed on her hand at the altar was still with her to remind her of the vows she had spoken.

CHAPTER VII.

PAUL'S VERSION AND LESLEY'S.

Two or three days after that interview between Louis de l'Aubonne and Lesley, Paul de l'Aubonne was chattering away in a morning call at Mrs Raymond's, Lesley was there, and Hugh Durne.

"And, think then!" said Paul, "my brother has come to Paris, mysteriously, without telling me of his arrival. I meet him by accident as I am walking with some friends, I say, 'Louis! Thou here!' he replies, 'I have urgent business,' and hurries away. That is all, and I do not know where he is, and he did not come to seek me yesterday even, me who felt so certain of his coming and waited indoors for him!"

"Not an affectionate brother," said Marion.

"Ah! pardon, it is not that; he is such a brother as there are few. But I fear he has been tempted to break a promise to me—a miracle in him it is true—and therefore he avoids me."

"Well, you will no doubt hear from home why he is here and where."

"No, I must not ask news of him from home; I might cause him an inconvenience; I imagine that his visit to Paris may be for a purpose they would disapprove. I believe I have told Madame his melancholy history."

"No," said Marion; "I do not remember."

"Ah, it was an unhappy affair! A countrywoman of yours—without the happy qualities of your countrywomen generally, Mesdames, excepting that she was very beautiful as I understand (I in the few moments in which I saw her had not leisure to judge)—of sufficiently good reputation apparently, but still, unfortunately for my poor brother, an adventuress, a young person in a humble station desirous of securing to herself by a lofty marriage a position to which only her beauty could advance her, acquired a fatal influence over

him. My brother is full of heart and generosity; in an evil hour he consented to take her to England and to go through the form of an English marriage with her."

"The form!" exclaimed Marion and Miss Raymond simultaneously.

"It was but a form, you understand, Mesdames, he being a Frenchman and acting against the will of his parents. However, the young person and her mother were overjoyed at engaging him so far—"

"Did *they* know it was only a form?" put in Durne.

"Assuredly—it is not to be supposed otherwise; but of course they did not betray themselves to my deluded brother, who looked on the girl as a vision of purity and guilelessness. But, the marriage once celebrated and my brother, as they conceived, so far compromised that his family would consider the union they desired for him impossible and would sanction this to prevent a scandal, the two women, having thus fooled his passion to the highest, *discovered,* if you please, that it was in-

sufficient, and the young person insisted on leaving him on the moment. My brother, whose eyes were not yet opened to her designs, was driven nearly mad—in a moment of desperation he was ready to sacrifice all his prospects, and, deserting his country for ever, place himself as an Englishman under the laws of England. But the impossibility of this idea was evident—he would have been entirely repudiated by his family, he would have been left without any means of supporting the young person, who was by no means likely to smile on such a prospect. He begged of her on his knees, with an anguish that frightened me, not to desert him—in his passion he was willing to defy his parents and the godfather from whom his now colossal fortune was to come. But she had become a Fury, a Megæra! She taunted him with the fault that only his love for her had caused, she forgot the vows she had just made him in the most solemn, the most sacred manner, she cast from her every recollection of love and faith. I was there and heard her renounce him!"

"But I do not understand," said Marion, puz-

zled with the story; "you talk of her sacred vows, I thought the marriage was informal, not binding in the least."

"So would the bridegroom when after questions arose, I fancy," said Durne, with the quiet voice and the half smile just straightening the lips which were so sovereignly displeasing to Marion.

"Madame!" exclaimed Paul indignantly, "was love promised solemnly, publicly, before God and man at the altar, to be annulled at a breath by a mere legal technicality? Was she for whom he was sacrificing all, to sacrifice nothing for him? But she smiled on him pitilessly and left him! left him in fact to die; for it was by miracle he recovered from the fever into which her desertion threw him. My poor Louis!" Paul, whose devotion to his brother was one of the strongest feelings in his nature, had tears in his eyes as he finished.

"Certainly," said Marion, still a little bewildered, "it would not have been too much for her to wait patiently till he could legalize the marriage—it was hard to punish him for a mistake

that must have been as painful for him as for her. But still I do not understand how a person such as you describe her came to let him go."

"She did not love him, that was all," said Paul, scornfully.

"She had the common-place fancy for marrying respectably, perhaps," suggested Durne, with his disagreeable smile.

Marion looked angrily at him: "She might have waited," she repeated; "what right had she to marry him at all if she did not care enough for him for that?"

"I should have fancied that was the question for *her* to ask *him*," said Durne.

"She was entirely scheming and heartless," Paul asseverated. "Her only idea was to ensnare him into a marriage that she might enjoy his wealth and position, and when she perceived that she had not attained that withal, she made him her curtsy and left him for ever."

"Ah, singularly heartless!" commented Hugh Durne.

"Yes, it *was* heartless, Mr Durne," said Marion,

vehemently. "You seem to think it a trifling thing for a girl—of the lower orders too—to draw a gentleman on till he is willing to give up all his prospects for her, and then because he cannot at once carry out his purpose and place her in the position she aimed at—and the delay not his own fault in the least but compelled by the French law—because he has to ask her, already declared his wife in the most solemn way possible, to wait for him a little while till he can persuade his friends, or I suppose till he is able in law to go through the forms for marrying independently of them, to break off the engagement and look out for a better chance? Why, how many young ladies are engaged trustingly for years with no such solemn contract to assure them! and this pitiful creature is to break faith with a man who was sacrificing so much for her, for such a reason as that!"

"As what?" asked Durne placidly.

He had worked Marion, who at first had not known what to make of Paul's narration, into a hearty indignation against the unknown adven-

turess, by his sneering manner. "I do not know what you mean," she said impatiently. "This mean scheming creature, after trying all her arts to attach a young man far above her in the world to her and making hersef mistress almost of his very soul, leaves him at a moment's warning because he cannot conclude a marriage which he had already done his utmost for quite so soon as she hoped, because she must wait till he is of age in France, I suppose—wait some months —years—what does it matter which? before he can claim her openly and bring her as his wife to the fine house and the splendour she was marrying him for. Is it not thus, Monsieur de l'Aubonne?"

"Certainly," affirmed Paul, "as Madame has said; because she has failed in securing the position at which she aimed, she has perjured herself and laughed at her sacred vows."

"And what *was* the position she aimed at? Being his lawful wife?" asked Durne, persisting.

Marion shrugged her shoulders and turned from him. She was not unwilling to indulge in a smile

at Paul's expense now and then but she felt Durne's affectation of not understanding provoking in the extreme: "Let us talk no more about it," she said.

Paul, who found the light in which Durne's question seemed about to place the matter an objectionable one, was quite willing to abstain from farther explanation. Violet Raymond tried to close the conversation by remarking in her bad French, "Well, I do not *quite* understand the story, but I think the person M. de l'Aubonne's brother wanted to marry against the law a very strange one not to have known her own mind, and not to jump at the opportunity she had been working for, since he was so willing to run the risk—and I suppose as she was English they could not do anything to her at any rate. However, I do not quite understand the affair, you know."

"Nor any of us, I think," said Durne, in a pretended aside.

He had the last word, for Maurice's entrance just then changed the tenor of the conversation.

And when Marion came to think of it afterwards she was not sure that the remark was so gratuitously impertinent as she had at first considered it. She was not sure that she did understand the affair, and she remembered that Paul de l'Aubonne's views on subjects in which he had any lively interest were apt to have a peculiar colouring, and began to blame herself, as she had done some scores of times before, for having been provoked into condemnation without fair previous investigation. She had to admit to herself that her sister-in-law's way of treating the subject, confused and blundering as it was, was more sensible than her's. Pondering this and trying to arrange again in her head the story which for the few minutes of her contest with Durne had seemed to her so clear, she became sufficiently absent to shorten the stay of her visitors. Even Maurice gave her up and agreed to accompany his friend to Tortoni's, "where," said Durne, "we may find our friend De l'Aubonne's pathetic recital continued in one of the feuilletons."

"What recital?" inquired Maurice.

"The sorrowful and romantic love tale of his brother. Do you know anything of the story?"

"Yes, at the time I did."

"And what did you think about it, Mr Maurice?" asked Marion, who had pretended not to hear Durne's observation about the feuilleton.

"I am mystified. I never have been able to make up my mind whether he was most wrong or wronged. But he was terribly ill from it, poor fellow."

It was only after they were gone and when Marion had coaxed Lesley into her own boudoir for a familiar chat that she remarked on the girl's alternate paleness and flush. "I was uneasy at one time," she said, "thinking you were ill, but I did not like to call attention to it; I thought it would discomfit you."

"Thank you," said Lesley; "Miss Raymond did ask me, but I got her to take no notice. I was not ill."

"Have you any suspicion of what disturbed me?" she resumed after a few moments' hesitation.

"No—yes—well, I thought something in the conversation might have some likeness to—might somehow annoy you: at least that was my real reason for stopping it so abruptly."

"Tell me, Marion, what did you understand from M. de l'Aubonne's story?"

"If I must own the truth, in my cooler reflection I find that I understand next to nothing of it. His brother married somebody, and then it turned out to be illegal, and she behaved badly —but whether it was that she had expected his family would give in at once and make it legal and didn't choose to wait, or whether she found out that however long she waited there would always be obstacles in the way of their marriage or that he would still lose his inheritance, I don't in the least know. Mr Durne put me out, or else I should have found out that I didn't at the time."

"Shall I tell you the true story, Marion?"

Marion looked at her earnestly. "You! you don't mean—yes, tell me, Lesley."

Lesley took up a little cross-inlaid prayer book that was lying on the table and held it in her

"The sorrowful and romantic love tale of his brother. Do you know anything of the story?"

"Yes, at the time I did."

"And what did you think about it, Mr Maurice?" asked Marion, who had pretended not to hear Durne's observation about the feuilleton.

"I am mystified. I never have been able to make up my mind whether he was most wrong or wronged. But he was terribly ill from it, poor fellow."

It was only after they were gone and when Marion had coaxed Lesley into her own boudoir for a familiar chat that she remarked on the girl's alternate paleness and flush. "I was uneasy at one time," she said, "thinking you were ill, but I did not like to call attention to it; I thought it would discomfit you."

"Thank you," said Lesley; "Miss Raymond did ask me, but I got her to take no notice. I was not ill."

"Have you any suspicion of what disturbed me?" she resumed after a few moments' hesitation.

"No—yes—well, I thought something in the conversation might have some likeness to—might somehow annoy you: at least that was my real reason for stopping it so abruptly."

"Tell me, Marion, what did you understand from M. de l'Aubonne's story?"

"If I must own the truth, in my cooler reflection I find that I understand next to nothing of it. His brother married somebody, and then it turned out to be illegal, and she behaved badly —but whether it was that she had expected his family would give in at once and make it legal and didn't choose to wait, or whether she found out that however long she waited there would always be obstacles in the way of their marriage or that he would still lose his inheritance, I don't in the least know. Mr Durne put me out, or else I should have found out that I didn't at the time."

"Shall I tell you the true story, Marion?"

Marion looked at her earnestly. "You! you don't mean—yes, tell me, Lesley."

Lesley took up a little cross-inlaid prayer book that was lying on the table and held it in her

hand. "This, that you may know I am speaking truth to the utmost."

"I always know that of you, Lesley. Do you think I shall not believe you?"

"Not if you believe Paul de l'Aubonne," said Lesley, with a forced smile; "but you will believe *me*."

She told her story simply without comment or expatiation. Marion understood *her* account at any rate—all but one point; she could not make out whether Louis was a noble young man hurried by some fatality into a wrong too late repented or whether he was, as she would rather have enjoyed thinking him, a despicable profligate who had planned and would have carried out unrelentingly a scheme of the most treacherous villany. Lesley's own mind seemed rather in confusion there; she answered Marion's questions as to his character now this way, now that, and, without appearing aware of any contradiction, at one moment assumed him superior to most, or all men, at another observed that it was better that even such a blow should have fallen on her than that she should be *his* wife. Now she spoke of

him as utterly dishonoured and shuddered at the method and hypocrisy of his guilt, and now she treated it like some inevitable calamity falling on him, the temporary aberration of a noble mind—though she did not now lay the blame on herself as in former troubled thoughts.

"I do believe, Lesley," said Marion at last as she sat with her arms still round her friend's waist, Lesley's sobbing fit and her own sympathizing tears over now, "that you think he was quite right and is very much of a fine fellow on the whole."

Lesley started, but said nothing.

"Lesley," asked Marion, gravely, "would you marry him if he came to you now?"

"Oh no no no," Lesley burst out. "Never—you don't know—" and the crying began again.

"I have not told you," she said presently, as she lay back leaning her head on Marion's shoulder still but calmer again, and Marion's soft hand was bathing her forehead with eau-de-cologne, "he came again the other day and asked me to be his wife, really his wife now he is free to do what he

likes—and *she* frees him—he praises her generosity—I hope she will make him happy."

"I hope she won't," said Marion vigorously.

"He has been again and again," continued Lesley in tremulous tones. "He makes me miserable! And oh, Marion, do not laugh at me, but it frightens me so that I still have the wedding ring—he *will* not take it from me—and—and I am weak and nervous and I have a terrible fancy creeping, creeping over me often and often that I belong to him while I have it."

"Hush, darling; you are exciting yourself, I mustn't have you cry. And, as for the ring, if it makes you uncomfortable we will give it to his brother Paul to return to him—it will be out of your hands then, whether the man himself takes it or no."

"Paul must not know," said Lesley, earnestly.

"It would be better he should, dear Lesley; such scenes as to-day's are awkward and distress you: and sooner or later he is sure to know. Better sooner."

"He must not, oh he must not! Louis has

promised her that no one should know he has come to seek me again—she knows pretty well that he is to come back to her after all," said Lesley, interrupting herself, with something a little too like a sneer. "For her sake he must keep it quiet, and that is right. And I—I could not bear it."

"Oh Lesley, better let him know; he must recognize you before long."

"He has not in all this time. He only saw me a few minutes. And Louis always called me Desirée, so he cannot even recognize my name."

"But your surname—Oh it will never do not to tell him now."

"If he hears it from his brother he will not easily recognize it as the same he hears here," said Lesley with a slight smile. "Besides, if he is to know—and, if Louis does not give up this wild pursuit of his, I know it must come to that before long—why should we hurry it? Let me be unnoticed now. Marion, you do not know what it is to bear already."

"Yes, Lesley, I do know. I feel it through you

as if it were myself—I feel even, darling, how you long and long to be out of this Louis de l'Aubonne's reach, to have him gone from you altogether, and yet can't shake off all his influence—I know you are even sometimes afraid you shall yield to it, suddenly when you don't expect it, but carried away by some impulse. Isn't it true?"

"Yes," faltered Lesley, gazing at her wonderingly.

"I don't know how I know it," continued Marion, "but I do know it as well as if I felt it myself, and I understand how you are clinging to your pride as the branch to save you from being swept away with the current, and yet how its great thorns pierce you, poor quiet little martyr. Don't think I don't feel what it is to bear. But is the kind of thing we have had to day to go on? Are we to let M. Paul de l'Aubonne—"

"Do I care what he says?" interrupted Lesley, lifting back her head with a slow haughty movement. "Why should I be afraid, since it is not true?"

"But, Lesley, an hour ago *I* did not know it was not true."

"Because you did not know it was of me he spoke," said Lesley, still with her neck arched and her upper lip curled in a proud half smile—smile in which there was no love nor joy. "Of *me*, no one can know that and believe him."

"But supposing—you know how communicative he is—just suppose he talks in that way to some one who does not really *know* you, or perhaps even to some one not acquainted with you at all."

"Then it would not matter," said Lesley, quietly.

Marion was puzzled for she could not contravert her friend in one of her own favourite theories, one too by which she was prepared to abide, yet she felt that Lesley with her sensitive shrinking nature could not carry it through, and she felt too that such slander as might grow from Paul's vague yet vehement accusations was beyond any of which an innocent woman could say calmly and bravely, "It does not matter."

"You cannot judge, Lesley; you are so ignorant of the world," she urged upon her.

"I know I am; but ignorance of the world does me no harm; I have nothing to do with the world."

"You will have; you are going to paint some of its pictures; it is beginning to ask about you."

"It would be wrong to let such a motive have the least influence on my conduct," was the calm answer.

Another puzzle for Marion, who held this theory too, and strongly but disputed it practically in this case. "It is not as if you were wanted to do anything wrong," was her final counter plea.

But Lesley still thought any explanation with Paul, even by delegate, painful and unnecessary.

"Besides," she said to satisfy Marion, "there is M. Gueret to give evidence to the truth if it should ever be requisite."

"And I mean to know that M. Gueret," said Marion, "if you will introduce him to me?"

"Yes," consented Lesley with approval. "Only you will not appreciate his goodness at first, I think. I am afraid you will laugh at him."

"Why? Is he so eccentric?"

"No, but he is amusingly precise; he makes a bow and a phrase, and then a phrase and a bow, and seems as if he had composed every speech beforehand. And it is all in a measured tone, like Mr Annesley's."

"It sounds like the description of a bore. But never mind, I must know him, and I'll give him a large leaf out of my 'cœur d'artichaux,' for your sake."

"Ah! Marion," said Lesley, who felt entitled to something of a return of confidence now, "are you not giving it away whole?"

Marion coloured to the forehead but answered quickly, with a laugh, "It wouldn't make much difference if I did, do you know. There's a German ballad I once read, I forget where but I don't think I dreamed it, about a young lady singing away alone in a wood about her heart and boasting that it was no good to any one without its key that she had hidden away and that nobody else knew where to find. I thought that such a sensible arrangement of her's that I have taken to it myself. It doesn't matter who

gets hold of the heart now; he might squeeze and hurt the poor thing as much as he pleased but he'd never get the key from me unless it suited my convenience."

"I know some one you will give it to before long, Marion."

"Perhaps—if he asks prettily for it, you know. But it's not in him to find it, if he were to hunt for it till—till he gave it up."

"Marion! you are unjust to speak slightingly of him—a man like that, strong and gentle and generous; what would you have more of him than he is?" Lesley had watched Maurice Maurice and knew that he was what the ideal Louis had seemed when she dreamed a year ago that she had found a hero for her own romance.

Marion was startled into earnest by her appeal. "I speak slightingly of him!" she said. "Oh no, Lesley, I have not one slighting word to say of him. I see more that is large and good in him than you do, with all your praise. I honour him—perhaps even I like him more than you know; I could glory in submitting my will to such a

master if—if—if *that* were to be. But just because I see so much in him I know what isn't there. And all there is to be made of what I said of him just now is that I don't think he understands me."

"Or," she added, in a half aside, "himself either perhaps."

"But," persisted Lesley, "you seem as if you distrusted him."

"No, I don't distrust him; I am sure he is utterly honourable and true-meaning. But—well you know, when a man takes his way blindfold he *may* find he has mistaken it and turn back again."

"I do not understand," said Lesley.

"No need that you should," laughed Mrs Raymond. "Perhaps *I* don't exactly understand, either. But *I* won't go blindfold; I'd peep out under my bandage at any rate."

"No, I do not understand," Lesley repeated. "All I see is that you are free to do as you like and that a man well worth your love and whom, as I believe, you do love, loves you very sincerely."

'Does he?" was Marion's vague reply. "Well, sometimes I think so too."

"Here are a lot of new English books," she went on, rising from her seat and dragging forward a box of books just arrived. "Choose which you'll take home; I shall take you back in the carriage, so we can carry a good provision—here is one Mrs Hawthorn will like now."

So they began rummaging the literary treasure, and the confidences were at an end. Marion kept her own counsel but she thought to herself, "We have not once mentioned Mr Maurice's name! any one overhearing us might say it was a suspicious sign that Lesley's 'Some one,' required no farther introduction. *He* all through, like a school-girl in love!" And she laughed at herself privately.

CHAPTER VIII.

VIOLET'S LOVERS.

MARION did not laugh at Simon Gueret as Lesley had predicted; she received his formal compliments with a good grace and did her best to emulate his ceremonious courtesy. "He is a good man," she said, "and he shall be as polite as he pleases. And I won't have him ridiculed." The prohibition was aimed at Durne and young Lesley; the latter especially standing in need of such a veto on his "chaffing" propensities. Durne laid his hand on his head solemnly: "On my head be it, oh queen, sister of the sun and moon, your slave will obey. Is it permitted to smile when that courtly gentleman is salaaming in the presence?"

"I'm sure I don't see why you should laugh at him, Mr Durne," remonstrated Miss Raymond. "He is a very gentlemanly nice man, I'm sure—and Mr Maurice told us he was a most worthy man."

The fair Violet had quite a flush on her face as she asserted the merits of the excellent banker, merits to which she was the more perspicacious from the fact of his treating her with a deferential gallantry to which, though he, poor innocent, supposed himself only to be paying the homage due to her sex, she was inclined to attribute a more tender though at present concealed meaning. Violet had never had a lover: there had been indeed the hero of her eighteenth spring, the author of the memorable Valentine, a lawyer's articled clerk who was shuffled out of her way by her anxious parents, but to her great and grievous mortification, perhaps to the sometimes aching of a heart which was womanly enough to have loved very truly if it had had the whom to love for want of which such a superfluity of affection moulders away in locked-up garners—

she had never had had a bonâ fide lover—*till now*, as she fondly whispered to herself, *till now*—two pleasant words of whose meaning honest Gueret, had he heard them, would have been supremely unconscious. But was it wonderful that under that flattering hallucination Miss Raymond should feel something of a glow on her cheek as she offered battle on behalf of her absent friend?

Violet was not remiss in confiding her new hopes to her sister-in-law—there was something so *very* marked in M. Gueret's manner, though at present, of course, he was careful not to advance too far—"such a short acquaintance, you know, and no knowing how it would be taken if he said *too* much,"—that it had really become quite unmistakeable now. "I think it only right to tell you, my dear," said Violet, looking down, "as, though I am not *your* age, I am not old enough to be quite free from remark, and in case of anything being said, you know, now I shall be able to say that I made it known from the very first to you, as my nearest relation and, as a married

woman, you know, though you are such a young one, a kind of guardian."

Marion, who had observed the recent development of certain youthful proclivities as to dress and manner in her sister-in-law and had imagined some such explanation of them, had made her own observations and was disposed to conclude from them that Violet's flamboyant superstructure was raised on an altogether visionary foundation and fated to be presently toppled down by some rude shock. But she had small inclination to play the destroyer's part herself; she was loath to give pain to this good creature, whom she had never once heard speak an ill-natured thought and who would be the last to throw ridicule on another for even so ridiculous a mistake as this. She did not like to humiliate her in the midst of her pleased and harmless vanity; the castle in the air would melt away gradually of its own accord, she thought, and she would not cruelly shake down its frail buttresses with laughter: so she temporized, and only brushed against it stealthily with hints and questions meant to sug-

gest something like a doubt of its stability to the deluded lady. But Miss Raymond was quite too well satisfied with her view of the state of the case to be brought to suspect any discrepancy in it—her castle was impervious to any such petty assaults.

"But what has he said or done to give you the impression that he cares for you?" asked Marion, seriously.

"Well, dear, I really—how can one explain these things, you know? It isn't anything particular; not any one thing I mean that he says or does; but it's all put together—the manner you know. I am sure *you* ought to understand what I mean."

"Yes," said Marion, "I know there is a manner some men put on, and some have unconsciously, perhaps, that implies a great deal more than it means."

"Oh! but Marion, M. Gueret is quite an honourable man; a good deal too honourable for that."

"Yes, yes, of course. It is out of the question

that he should be *intending* to put you in a ridiculous position. But you think you can be quite sure that there is something especial to you in his manner? You know, dear Violet, we *can* mistake sometimes when we have only guess-work to go by—any one may mistake."

"Well, dear, I know to ordinary observers there must seem to be no difference, no *marked* difference, you know, in his manner to me and to other people; but then, you know, the person herself can always tell. There is an intuition."

"I'm afraid, though, that notion of intuition isn't always a safe one for a woman to act on."

"Oh no, of course not, and I shall be very careful, you know, very prudent; it won't do to let a thing of this kind go far without having everything understood. But you may be quite sure of what I say, dear; I always have had that peculiar intuition that I have known in a moment when a man was attracted towards me. Circumstances have always prevented anything coming of it, you know; but I always have known when there has been an inclination."

"But you have something more than that to go on at present?" asked Marion, whose confidence in the intuition was no way augmented by Miss Raymond's explanation of its nature.

"Oh yes, dear, so many little signs that I can't remember just at this moment—quite insignificant separately, you know—indeed I can see that he is afraid to show too much, it seems as if his respect for me kept him back—and that respect is always one of the chief signs of a real attachment—but a number of little things like those, put together, you know, show more than anything."

"Like what?" persevered Marion.

"Well, I really—it is so difficult to explain—but I can see when he is talking to any one else how he listens for me to speak; he knows in a minute, and he watches me without coming near; the very instant I move he knows it and rushes to open the door or set me a chair, or whatever it is I want, you know."

"So he does to me," remarked Mrs Raymond. "I never saw any one more anxious to be polite to all ladies."

"Oh, but that is so different! don't you understand, Marion?"

"No," said Marion.

"Well, you understand how Mr Maurice is to you?"

"No," said Marion

"I mean that everybody understands he is paying you attention, dear, and of course you must see things, you know—And I'm sure I am quite willing to see you marry again, if it is to some worth such a good wife. But that isn't what I was going to say; I meant that it isn't, you know, anything in particular that shows it so much, but the whole manner—everyone can see that—I mean it is impossible for anyone to tell about these things but the person it's meant for."

The argument was disconnected, to say the least of it, but Marion allowed it to silence her objections for the present.

One point blank question, however, she still put; "Do you wish then to marry M. Gueret?"

"Wish! Oh, no. The wish is quite on his side, you know."

"But should you marry him if he asked you?"

"Well—I really—it is too early for such a question yet, you know," hesitated the diffident Violet, looking down and gasping for a blush: "one cannot tell—I could hardly accept him, you know—there might be some objections."

"There might be grave objections. And indeed I cannot but think you should look well into the matter before you take it seriously."

Miss Raymond took the remark as a compliment, for she thought it implied that her sister-in-law believed her likely to have the decision of the momentous question in her own power. Her heart leaped and fluttered more than ever after that conversation, and her perennial smile made creases in her fat cheeks. She drooped modestly on her stem and affected shades of violet in her dress more than ever: as both her hair and complexion were flaxen the tint was rather trying to her, but then it was so sweetly suggestive.

What it suggested to the worthy Gueret it is difficult to say. When her ponderous coquetries first became perceptible to him, which was not till

long after they had become an old story to every other beholder and supremely irritating to Marion (who deserved credit for nothing more than for her carefully guarded equanimity to her husband's sister), he seemed to be alarmed, and the care with which he protected himself from the lady's encouraging manœuvres threatened some detriment to his hitherto immaculate politeness. But after a while—whether because he reflected that after all she could not marry him by force, or whether because he began to be flattered by her appreciation of him, remains unknown—he relented towards this dangerous assailant, and subsided into his normal courtesy. Then Miss Raymond had indeed a triumph. "Veni, vidi, vici," cried the jubilant heart within her; she had seen her lover—unquestionably now her lover—struggle in vain with the overmastering passion and come back vanquished for ever, hugging his chains and happy to lie at her feet.

Marion and Lesley, to whom Miss Raymond confided this victory of her conscious charms, were confounded. "How *can* one undeceive her?" said Marion, desperately; "I have tried everything

short of downright ridicule and rudeness. And he really has given up avoiding her. Will it actually come to anything?"

"I almost fancy M. Gueret is beginning to think of it:" said Lesley. "He told me the other day she was a most excellent person and well preserved; and, to tell you the truth, he asked me what her fortune was."

Gueret *was* beginning to think of it. He had been a widower five years; he was not obstinately bent on remaining one. Indeed, had it been feasible, he would gladly have set our Lesley in his comfortable home to freshen it with her artless youth and grace—such a vision had glimmered out of the fire to him more than once in his twilight solitude—but it was not feasible, that was plain. And, as it was also plain that no other wife of such unsuitable years could be safely trusted to add to his happiness, it did occur to him, now that Miss Raymond had forced the possibility of such an arrangement on his consideration, that a respectable kind-hearted woman like Miss Raymond, with a sufficiently pleasing appearance, considering her

age, and in all probability a convenient fortune, might be a very tolerable companion for his advancing years.

In this light he put the case to some of his more intimate friends, and in this light they were disposed to view it. Pierre Baudoyer, with whom he discussed it in all its bearings, exclaimed, "By all means, my old friend! the idea is excellent! Mlle. Raymond certainly has some fortune; the child will tell thee that she is a kind and estimable person, and an English wife is a good find."

Mde. Baudoyer knitted her brows and looked intently on her uppermost black silk flounce, smoothing out an invisible crease with her fat brown hands. Old Pierre laughed; he knew that that meant, "Thou hast a French one."

"Very true," Gueret replied inadvertently.

At which Madame rose fiercely and making him a defiant curtsy begged that he would leave it to her husband to calumniate her and not permit himself also to make slighting observations on her in her own hearing.

Gueret offered the best apology practicable and

made haste to depart before worse came. He little thought that before he had got out of sight of the house there was a semi-love scene going on between that elderly couple, but under the impression of the threatening storm he had left, and recalling certain former experiences of his own, he was the more tempted to think that at any rate the English wife he had in view would be an improvement on some French ones he had known. Violet's good qualities, if not brilliant, were of the undeniable kind.

So Simon Gueret reconciled himself to the fate which Miss Raymond and his guardian angel (or were they identical?) had provided for him, and began with all solemnity to pay his homage. Violet was coy but she was not cruel, she did not intend him to despair. "I always was a bit of a flirt at heart," she told Lesley in a confidential mood; "and I can't help sometimes teasing him a little, you know, but I don't want to make him *really* jealous."

Jealous, said she? Had Violet two strings to her bow then? Well, Herbert Lesley always de-

clared that his tutor, if he could have ascertained in time that her brother's will had given her three hundred a year to add to her former three hundred, would have come forward as Gueret's rival. However that might be, Miss Raymond had no intuitions concerning him, but she bestowed a good deal of attention on him in her coquettish moods, flattering herself that she was arousing jealous pangs in Gueret's breast. Ralph Annesley was glad to have one unopposing listener to his diatribes and bestowed a good deal of edifying conversation on her. She received it placidly; she looked upon him as a good man, rather inconveniently good perhaps, but for that very reason claiming all the reverence she could give him, so she took him at his own valuation and she listened nothing questioning, being, like a good many other people, too much awed by the sound of any scriptural quotations to have the presumption to think whether they were properly used. Wrested or not wrested they were texts and Miss Raymond heard them, as she did a sermon, with a hazy sense that something sacred was going on and doubtless

doing her good. She would as soon have thought of raising her voice in contradiction to the reverend Ralph's enunciations as of impugning the validity of the three creeds. But when he began to flatter himself that he had made a convert and to share with her his lamentable opinion of the spiritual state of the friends around her, suggesting to her to indicate her own enlightenment by variations in costume and conduct from those to which she and they were accustomed, he met with insuperable obstacles. Violet Raymond, a woman with a true and reverent faith, had no articles to her religion, she was not capable of either perceiving or solving doctrinal questions, she had simply received what was taught her in her childhood and cherished it till it had become part of her; consequently she was entirely unable to see the discrepancies he pointed out between her religion and her mode of life, or to find faults in the beliefs of others. She would accept with a sigh and a shake of the head Annesley's denunciations of Worldliness in the abstract, but when he came to particulars she would remark complacently that dancing

did seem frivolous to her now she was a little older and more thoughtful but still she had never found it do her any harm when she was a girl and she thought it very natural that Marion should like it; or that there couldn't be much harm in thinking a little about one's dress, people were forced to do it, you know, but certainly, as Mr Annesley said, one ought not to lose one's soul for it; or that wearing artificial flowers was not so much giving in to vanity and deceits quite as he supposed, for, you know, you must have something to wear inside your bonnet, it would be so odd and unbecoming without, and ribbons took much longer matching than flowers, and nobody ever intended to pass off the flowers for real—how could they? She could not defeat his arguments in short, but she got the better of them all unconsciously by simply not apprehending them.

Nevertheless Ralph Annesley found comfort in her because she neither despised nor disputed his teachings. He could not bring himself to forego the advantages and hospitalities of Mrs Raymond's house, but even his self-complacency could

not blind him to the slight esteem he was held in by her intimate friends and, in spite of her sisterly yearnings, by herself, and while he almost persuaded himself that his virtuous indignation was all on behalf of The Message (as he called the expression of his religious opinions) which they slighted and not on behalf of his own mortified vanity, he came very near hating them all—and I am afraid quite to that point with his disrespectful pupil. Even Lesley, though she never laughed at him nor argued against him, did not escape, for she had at first, in all simplicity really, but he chose to fancy with malicious intent, posed him by asking inopportunely for definitions of favourite terms which were indefinite to himself and explanations of his meaning which he was unable to furnish, and she had finally left off attending to what he said, very much as if she had not found it worth while. Miss Raymond was the only exception; his friendship for her was not warm, but he did not dislike her. Perhaps Herbert Lesley's assertion had some foundation and the reverend Ralph would not have been

unwilling to take charge of her and her fortune if he could have been sure in time that the fortune was sufficient to reward his trouble. He was a poor man and though Marion was abundantly liberal it is not pleasant to depend too much on a sister's caprice: she might turn against him and withdraw her hand, or, what was much more to be feared, she might marry and her husband prove less considerate of Mr Annesley's comfort than herself—he said *even* than herself, because Marion had been pertinaciously deaf to all his suggestions about her giving or buying him a living. "There are so many noble Christian men to be preferred before poor Ralph for that work," she said to herself, "I cannot find it in my conscience." "Heaven help the parish that gets him!" thought her old friend the rector of Ormeboys when she consulted him, and, although he did not say that right out, Marion knew what he thought her duty was. Ralph would have no church benefice through her help.

Marion thought she detected indications that some calculations concerning Violet Raymond's

rental were presenting itself to him at this time, but she had no intention of simplifying them by the communication of her own knowledge; in fact she took pains to mystify him on that score. She was growing to think better of him as she perceived that he was no deliberate hypocrite but himself a believer in his high pretensions and, though unchristian by no small amount of spiritual arrogance and bigotry, sincerely convinced of his religious opinions: nevertheless she knew him to be still the Ralph Annesley of his younger days, selfish and grasping to the heart's core, and she was resolute to thwart any interested designs he might entertain on her mature sister-in-law—a fact of which she took care to make him aware by one or two sufficiently palpable hints.

Of course she thereby increased his dislike to her remarrying. She was alive to that contingency, and she had comprehended too from the first few days of his stay in Paris that he was uneasy about Maurice and would do all in his power to disturb the understanding to which they appeared to

be gradually coming. She was therefore not in the least surprised when she found him perpetually retailing all tittle-tattle, old and new, which could tend to lessen her high opinion of the dreaded suitor, nor at his many discoveries of neglect or disrespect in Maurice's bearing to her, nor even when he finally adventured a remonstrance on her encouragement of so unsuitable a person, who, as it appeared by Ralph's arguments, was neither a converted person nor so influential a one as the rich Mrs Raymond might aspire to, if she really was willing to incur the stigma the world casts on widows who remarried and to disobey the New Testament, which was evidently against second marriages. He further laboured to convince her that Maurice, who, he remarked, had not seemed inclined to do more than amuse himself with her when she had been a girl without fortune, was now only anxious to get possession of her late husband's large property. But when he came to this Marion's wrath was aroused; she spoke once, no more, but Ralph Annesley did not soon forget the contemptuous rebuke he received

and he made no open attempt to dissuade her from her intimacy with Maurice again.

Still his obstinacy, which was now enlisted, forbad him to give up the matter. So he persuaded himself that he was opposing this marriage on conscientious principles and out of regard, not to his own interests, but to those of his sister; and he used what weapons remained to him, he laboured to induce a misunderstanding. He would not lie, but part of the truth told in a certain way often has even a surer effect in mischief-making; he would not even prevaricate, unless driven very hard, but he might *hint;* he would not add a false meaning, but he could withhold the true. Marion saw through him and would look at him with a peculiar smile of which Ralph soon became afraid, it seemed to set some raw place in his conscience throbbing and he came nearer to feeling humiliated under its influence than, with his safeguard of conceit, was generally possible to him.

He tried Maurice. Maurice understood his hints and their object and quietly despised him.

But one day Ralph Annesley ventured so far as to speak to him all but openly on the subject, and, prepared to find a strong instrument in its effect on Maurice's pride, alluded to "what was generally supposed" as to the enticements of the lady's wealth. Maurice allowed him to come to an end at his own good time, waiting for it with unmoved composure, a circumstance which however rather hurried and flurried the sentences, but Mr Annesley did not much like the look on his face when the end *had* come. In fact Maurice was struggling with a strong temptation to knock his adviser down—it was an unadvisable step under all the circumstances however, and the temptation was resisted. And so was even the further temptation of mentioning in a quiet way the existence of the first. Maurice merely said loftily, "May I ask, are you in any way Mrs Raymond's guardian?"

"A—no—no—a, I do not put it in that light," stammered Mr Annesley. Then recovering himself he made a grand stroke, "But as her brother I cannot but be aware of Mrs Raymond's impressions."

Maurice looked suspiciously at him, but what he had said delayed the suggestion that he had better mind his own business which he had intended to convey—in more dignified context however.

"You don't mean to say, sir, that you have presumed to make to Mrs Raymond the insinuation you have had the impertinence to express to me?" he said angrily.

All Ralph Annesley's self-assertion came to the rescue, he drew himself up stiffly, "I have entered into conversation with my sister on this subject, sir, as my position both as her brother and as a minister of the word required me to do: and with regard to any doubt there may be on her mind or on that of her friends as to your disinterestedness, her remark has been, 'I don't require any body to tell me that rich Marion Raymond is better worth having than poor Marion Annesley—*I* can take care of that.'"

It was not a lie, Ralph Annesley, but in what respect was it better?

Maurice only half believed him, he thought that

Marion had been provoked into one of her hasty speeches, one which was never meant to express her deliberate conviction concerning him: but still it galled him sorely, and he could not but ask himself if she could have spoken thus of him had she honestly valued him as a friend, to say no more.

He did not think fit to inform Ralph Annesley that till then he had believed that the greater part of Mrs Raymond's fortune passed from her in the event of her marrying again; all the further notice he took of that gentleman's interference was to request him pretty sternly to be good enough not to drag Mrs Raymond's name into such a conversation again, and to spare the pains of further criticism on his conduct and intentions, real or supposed: "a freedom," he said significantly, "which I am hardly prepared to allow even to my friends."

Ralph Annesley had to put up with Maurice's hauteur as best he could, it was not expedient nor, as he told himself, allowable to him as a Christian, to come to a quarrel. But he had not

entirely missed his aim, he had at least checked the too rapid approach of the understanding he dreaded. Maurice had a certain annoyance and reserve in his manner to Marion from that time, which, she quickly detecting, imitated with trebled increase, and the issue of their fitful courtship thus remained still in abeyance.

If Marion really wished to become Mrs Maurice she might have been wiser not to thwart her brother in any little plan he might have for securing a comfortable independence. Say that he had secured Violet Raymond's six hundred a-year, he would have been relieved a good deal of his anxiety on Marion's account.

CHAPTER IX.

A BRACELET DROPPED.

MEANWHILE Herbert Lesley, as unconscious of his tutor's anxieties as he would have been disdainful had he been made aware of them, was enjoying to his heart's content that amusement of shocking and ridiculing his dearest prejudices, by which he compensated himself for the unwelcome companionship. The one restraint on his ingenuity in that respect was that Lesley, whom he pronounced the nicest girl he had ever met, having an innocent habit of accepting all the statements of her friends as facts, was oftener taken in by it than Mr Annesley was and would look very grave sometimes over his professed customs and opinions. Nor would she allow his explanation of such things only being said in fun—

"But you said it *was* so," she used to answer gravely, and Herbert coloured and was vexed to see his joke in the light of an untruth.

"His cousin," as he chose to call her, was however on the best of terms with him and always ready to listen with smiling interest to his in itself not very interesting talk. She more than any one else was favoured with the young man's crude and fluctuating opinions on the great generalities of life, and she was the readiest listener to his liberal communications anent his doings and belongings.

"I know you think me shamefully lazy for not having a profession," he would say to her.

"Well, I think I do respect the workers more than the lookers on," Lesley answered once, with a laugh that saved the reproof from discomfiting him much however.

"Well, I suppose I ought to get to something, but it isn't my fault after all. I wanted of all things to go to sea—a jolly profession that would just have suited me—but my mother said I should be drowned. Then when I found that was no

good and I got past the age I stuck out for the army, but my father wouldn't hear of that, said the army was a bad school for young men, so what was there left for a fellow to do?"

Lesley not being ready with a profession to suggest, he continued, "I ought to have gone to college like other young men with 'hexpectations,' and I wanted to, but the governor wouldn't have it unless I gave my word to be a slow man and read—regularly grind, you know—and I couldn't pledge myself, I know I shouldn't have stuck to it. And I don't much think there's anything in my head worth the grinding."

"I think every one's head has something in it if they only know how and where to look for it," Lesley said.

"If you had one like mine you'd know better," was the laughing reply.

"But," said Lesley, "it does not require unusual talent not to be idle."

"It seems to require more than I've got, usual or unusual. But I expect it will end by my going in for it with my uncle the banker—the governor

has rather an idea of something of that kind and if he makes it pleasant I don't so much mind. I suppose I ought to do something after all, I'm not an eldest son you know, there's poor Frederick."

"Does he suffer much, poor fellow?" asked Lesley pityingly.

"No—he doesn't seem to say so and he's the kind of fellow to be pretty sure to let you know if he did—it's a bad look out for him though, poor fellow. What a terrible thing it would be to have happen to one."

"Yes, or to one's brother," sighed Lesley. "It must be a great grief in the family."

"I don't know. I think we're all pretty well used to it, the accident happened so many years ago. I know we were all very sorry then. But *I* was a child and never fretted long over anything, and after all one does nobody any good by lamenting over him."

"Well," Lesley said, "I suppose that is what you call a philosophical way of looking at the matter but it sounds a little hardhearted."

"Oh that's what ladies always say, they never

like a man unless he's all sigh-away and die-away and can have tears in his eyes whenever he wants to, the way they can."

"You tell me so many odd things about ladies, I shall begin to think your sisters must be very artificial and very strange in their feelings," remarked Lesley, who had often been amused at his ideas of femininity.

"My sisters: oh no, I don't hear much from them, we are not a very confidential lot at home, we all go on our own ways, and they don't take me into their counsels."

"That accounts for so many of your ideas about ladies being mistaken. But I am afraid you cannot be a very good brother."

"Well now I'll just tell you. Last time I was at home Octavia and Eloisa both had their heads full of a Captain Somebody or other—Mantell—Montell—Montell, that was it. I'd heard of the fellow and knew that he was a humbug and worse. So I just gave them a hint or two—Didn't I get in the black books that's all! Octavia put on the overpowering and said—"

And so on. In this way Lesley became pretty familiar with this young man's domestic relations. Besides that she liked him for his good temper and cheeriness she had her private inducement to listen to his unreserved talk.

What this inducement was would have remained unknown to all but her mother and Marion but for a chance. Marion was singing one evening and Lesley, lost in the sweet music, leant lightly back in her chair with her cheek resting on her pink finger-tips and her eyes looking into dreams. With the strong light glittering her hair and given back from her white dress, so trim with its dainty cerulean ribbons, on to the shadowed cheek in soft reflections, with her rare complexion and pure outlines thrown out from the rich background of crimson velvet, with the motionless drooping grace of her careless pose, she made so exquisite a picture that Maurice, a real beauty-worshipper, could not look away from her, and as he watched he was struck with the sadness deepening on the fair fresh face in its repose and began to speculate

upon it till she became the poem to Marion's music and unconsciously his gaze grew so intent that Lesley was all at once aware of it and was discomposed. With a nervous movement she began to fidget at the clasp of her bracelet by way of hiding her confusion, and before she could save it the fastening gave way and the bracelet fell to the ground.

If Lesley had possessed a choice of ornaments she would not have worn this one at this time, but she was too pretty to be careless of her appearance and she liked to see her dress complete with the little feminine adornments, she could not please herself with the unfinished look of leaving one of her bare white arms unbraceleted; and after all it could tell no tales while she wore it. But now she was annoyed at her imprudence. The ornament was a noticeable one for its antique shape and a quaint pattern worked round it in garnets, she knew that Herbert Lesley, who had picked it up for her, would not return it without examining it.

"The clasp seems to open underneath for hair

or something," he said as he turned it about. "May I look?"

She would have said No if he had not forestalled her answer by opening the little miniature case, taking her permission for granted.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Herbert.

But for the old fashioned dress and a difference in expression and in the colour of the hair the portrait might have been his own.

"Why!" said Herbert, still all amazed, "we have the duplicate of this! It's my father. But—I don't understand—I thought you said he was no relation of yours."

"No," Lesley said quietly, "I said nothing about it; I knew your father must be my mother's brother."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Herbert with his face very red. After a moment's pause for the more complete taking in of the intelligence, "It's the jolliest news I've heard for a long time. I'd rather have you for a cousin than any girl I know. But how does it come about?"

"Simply that my mother was your grandfather

Herbert Lesley's only daughter and youngest child. Her family did not like her marriage and behaved badly to her about it, and she ceased to be one of them. So I am afraid we must ignore the cousinship."

"Why? we are real first cousins. And why on earth did you conceal it from me? or have you only just found out yourself?"

"No. I knew it must be when I first saw you, and afterwards I was made quite sure by things you told me. But my mother and I do not choose to claim relations who cast us off so entirely: and that is why I say we will ignore the cousinship. Why think, you were not even told of my mother's existence."

"I shall go and see my aunt to-morrow."

"No, you will not. She will not see you against your father's wish."

"Then I shall write to him at once and tell him about you. It's too bad—his own sister and niece. I shall write by the next post."

"You need not," said Lesley, a little scornfully. "We are too humble to interest Mr Lesley."

But Herbert was not going to be put down in that way. In a few minutes, and without in his eagerness, even hearing Lesley's prohibition, he had claimed congratulations on his newly discovered relationship from every one in the room: and that done, he went off in a mood even more hilarious than was his wont, to write his letter, bent on making sure of its going by the very next post.

In a few days his father's answer arrived. It entered into so many details on so many subjects foreign to the one in which Herbert felt most interest at present that it was no slight trial of his perseverance, never very great, to wade through them in search of the looked for paragraph. It came at last. "You are quite right in supposing that Mrs Hawthorn is my only and once beloved sister Mary. Although, in consequence of her own wilful conduct, I have so long lost sight of her, I am glad to hear of her again, and, as you are able to give so satisfactory an account of her present position, and her daughter is received in such good society and, as you tell me, has already attained considerable distinction as an artist (which

is less objectionable than her being a governess, as I should have expected, and without doubt a *distinguished* artist may be regarded as in a social position different from that of an *ordinary* one and less annoying to us), I see no objection to your continuing the acquaintance, and you may tell them that I shall always be pleased to hear of them. At the same time, I should advise you not to be *too* much *in public* with them, nor in any way to identify yourself with them, as the fact of the artistship at all is rather derogatory to the family, and therefore though you need not deny the relationship you are not called upon to parade it. However, I should wish you to show them any little kindness and attention you can without inconvenience. Your mother is annoyed at the recognition and fears they will somehow or other force themselves upon us, which, as they must have mixed with queer people during their poverty, might be embarrassing, but as the recognition *has* taken place I think it better that you should accept it, and from what you say I conceive that your cousin Lesley (we could wish they

had given her a name which should not have connected her so evidently with our family) cannot be so vulgar and uneducated as your mother thinks probable. You can tell me more about them as you see more, for they are *my* only relations after all."

Herbert showed this to Mrs Raymond. "Don't let Lesley know what he says," she advised him, for she thought him quite capable of such an inadvertence. "She would never get over it. With all her gentleness she has a pride that it isn't safe to wound. Not that she ever retaliates, I don't think even she ever has an unkind feeling, but she *feels* her memory longer than most people."

So Herbert only imparted to his cousin and to his aunt, with whom he was now allowed to make acquaintance, the message to them and the phrase, "Tell me more about them as you see more, for they are my only relations after all." And Mrs Hawthorn returned an equally conciliatory message to her brother, and Lesley no longer considered it necessary to ignore the cousinship.

But Marion was fiercely indignant against Mr Lesley, senior. "A selfish petty-minded mammon worshipper," she called him to Maurice, whom Herbert had acquainted with the terms of the letter, "without even the grace to gloss over his meanness—"

"That is, without the grace of hypocrisy," interrupted Maurice, laughing.

"Hypocrisy!" Marion exclaimed, "I've no doubt he's *cased* in hypocrisy—the sort of man to be always talking respectability and morality and thanking Heaven he is not as other men are, without a thought of his own excepting how to get on in the world. I can just fancy him, pragmatic and selfish, without a laugh or a fancy in him: and as to loving anybody but himself!" Marion's look finished the sentence.

"He isn't much like his son if he hasn't a laugh in him," remarked Maurice, amused at her vehemence.

"No, his son is cheery and hearty enough. Does the heartiness go deep though, do you think?"

"My word for it there is no affectation of any kind in that young man. His one fault and his one quality and his whole character seem to me to be an unlimited goodnature."

"Yes," Marion answered, "and I didn't mean to accuse him of affectation in the least. You have agreed with what I meant when you say his one quality is goodnature. Goodnature alone doesn't go far. I like him, no one can help liking him, but for all that he has the selfishness of unsympathizing goodnature. But there, he can't help being selfish with such a father."

"Still the father! I do admire your thoroughgoing indignation."

"And you don't share it? You really don't share it?" Marion was inclined to be angry with Maurice himself now as an aider and abettor of Mr Lesley's conduct, though she knew in her heart as well as if he had told her, that on this point her thoughts were his.

"Indeed but I do. I have seldom seen a more thoroughly heartless letter, and it was as much as I could do to refrain from giving my opinion

of it to young Lesley rather too plainly. If I had been in your place I should have been inclined to let Miss Hawthorn have an idea of the thing and refuse such an ungraciously offered olive-branch, as she would have been sure to do, for she seems to have plenty of self-respect."

"Ah, but you don't know how glad I am to have her acknowledged by her relations; she is in sore need of responsible friends, poor child, she is in a cruel position."

"Has anything happened to her lately?" asked Maurice interested.

"Nothing she would like me to tell you," said Marion. She could not tell him, though she was certain that some chance soon would, that Louis de l'Aubonne was following the defenceless girl he chose now to call his wife with a daily persecution of passion and reproach that was beginning to wear her life down again into the former misery.

But she added: "She is almost alone and stands in need of good help, and I think her cousin may be something of a protector."

"He will take the office willingly at any rate, and I fancy with her consent. She has been looking absent and distressed lately, but I am sorry to have to think that it has been on account of "le beau cousin."

"Why sorry, since you think so well of him? not that it is so I am sure."

"Isn't it? Well, I don't want to gossip, though I have my suspicions. But I am sorry because, though I think you do him injustice by calling him selfish for he seems to me a generous open-hearted young fellow, I don't quite think him up to the mark for her. And I should imagine her to be one of those they talk about with the necessity of loving strong in them; one who would make the mistake, but then pine away in an ill-assorted union. However it's no business of mine certainly."

"No," said Marion. "And you have made a love-drama all out of nothing, for neither of them acts out the part. I'm quite sure there's nothing of the kind in either of their minds. Not but that what you say about Lesley is true enough, though

I can't think how you came to find it out; she certainly has that necessity of loving and she might make the mistake—once."

"*Once*," repeated Maurice with a laugh; "once might be fatal." And then, vexed with himself as it occurred to him that Mrs Raymond might somehow imagine an allusion to her own case in his remark, he hastened to add: "We are not talking generally—I mean we were looking at Miss Hawthorn's case, possible case I should say, apart from any—from all others."

Marion understood his embarrassment, and, never being ready to suppose ill intention, was very willing to relieve him from it, which was best to be done by continuing the conversation naturally.

"Yes," she said, "where feeling comes into the count one can never judge one case entirely by another. And after all we are agreed this time. It would kill Lesley to be unhappily married. She *must* not."

But Marion was not thinking of Herbert Lesley but of Louis de l'Aubonne when she spoke that *must not* so earnestly.

CHAPTER X.

A PUZZLE SOLVED.

At this time Maurice, observing Lesley's pensive face pretty constantly, began to be haunted by a likeness between it with the look of trouble it was beginning to wear and some other beautiful sad face vaguely shadowed in his memory. Where had he seen it? It was one of those indistinct presentations which fret the mind with an irritating sense of searching in the dark, or as if a picture were passed before the eyes and removed too quickly to impress a distinct image on the retina. It became a trouble to him; he pondered over it in vain; he studied Lesley's face feature by feature until his evident observation became painful to her, without the unknown resemblance reveal-

ing itself; he tried time after time to summon up that other face, of whose existence somewhere he became more and more convinced, but no, it would not come out of its mists. As to putting the puzzle aside and forgetting it, any one who has been pursued by such a one, an undiscoverable likeness, a wordless rhythm echoing again and again, the silent cadence of some irrecoverable phrase of melody, the consciousness of some forgotten phrase—any one who knows what these mean knows the futility of such an effort.

"Hawthorn! Why! Of course that's it. What a fool I was not to think of it!" ejaculated Maurice one day in the midst of a morning's letter-writing. Why the solution of the enigma flashed upon him at that moment, while his pen was busy on a subject of no possibly-to-be-traced connection with it, he never could say. "Of course!" he repeated and drew a long breath.

"What is it?" asked Durne. "You seem pleased with your discovery.

"Eh? Pleased—h'm pleased—well, I don't know," said Maurice, who, in the first flush of

victory over his invisible sphynx, had not yet thought of its consequences. "It's a relief to have identified a likeness that was haunting you without your being able to fix it."

"Yes, I know that kind of vague remembering, and a precious worry it is. But what's the likeness? one to Lesley Hawthorn?"

"Only it will probably cost me a few thousands," pursued Maurice quietly.

"The deuce it will! A few thousands! What do you mean?" said Durne discomposed for once. "You take it coolly too," he added in his usual manner as he saw Maurice quietly thinking. "Happy man, what are a few thousands to you? A flea-bite, sir, a flea-bite."

"Not much of that. I can't afford to talk lightly of thousands, especially just now with those expensive improvements on hand—however I *can* lose whatever this could possibly turn out to be and not starve. Don't say anything about it just at present, there's a good fellow, we shall see in a little while."

Maurice added a postscript to his letter to his

agent. Then he went to Mrs Raymond's, rather with the hope of finding Lesley there and testing his recent discovery by comparing the face he now had plainly in his eye with hers; but she was not there. Marion was surprised at his absent mood; he seemed to be lost in thought while she spoke, and answered nothing to the purpose.

"What was that story about Miss Hawthorn's grandfather?" he asked abruptly.

Marion told him as she had once told him before.

"Did his family know where he went when he left England?"

Marion thought Lesley did not know anything of his relations with his family.

"Does she, or her mother, know nothing about them?"

"Nothing, I think, excepting who they were and the name of the place, or places, they some of them lived in—just what they gather from a few old letters and papers the old servant that saved the child took care of, thinking they might be

of consequence—which they are not. Why do you ask?"

"Only that Miss Hawthorn is so like a picture I have seen."

In a few days the picture came in obedience to his postscript. It was a full length miniature of a woman about five and twenty years old, dressed in one of the quaint and ungraceful dresses of the latter half of the eighteenth century; the hair, drawn off the forehead and thickly powdered, seemed to be of some dark tint, and the eyebrows and lashes were dark, having indeed the appearance of being much darker in the portrait than they ought to have been naturally, in order to agree with the cool grey eyes and the roseate, almost blonde, complexion. What was most remarkable was a peculiarly sorrowful expression at variance with the character of the face, which was of one of those softly-moulded juvenescent types which seem to indicate a child-like capacity of enjoyment.

"Do you recognize this likeness?" asked Maurice of Durne when he received it.

"To Miss Hawthorn you mean—yes—If you hadn't given me reason beforehand to know who you meant though I don't say I should—at once at least. But there is a peculiar pose of the head and something about the mouth, as if it had been made for smiling and taken to crying, that is very suggestive of her."

"I don't know that one can call it a likeness though," he went on as he looked longer, "you have Lesley Hawthorn for the first moment and then she seems to disappear out of it—all but that wistful expression she has sometimes as if something had gone wrong and she couldn't understand it. Is this supposed to be an ancestress of hers? it would pass for that very fairly."

Maurice tried Mrs Raymond with it. "Who is it like?" she repeated after him. "Well—let me think—yes I *have* seen the face too—Is it Mrs—no. The eyes would be Lesley's if the lashes were a little lighter, and the shape of the forehead is hers exactly. But,"—

She held it a little farther off and looked again.

"Oh! it is Lesley, it is her look exactly. How

strange, for there isn't an atom of likeness in the rest of the face, excepting those eyes!"

"I see a good deal," said Maurice. Don't you notice the peculiarly delicate dimpling round the mouth and the curl of the upper lip, that a very little more would make scornful? And look it has the very line of the beautiful curves from the forehead to the swell of the cheek."

"So it has," said Marion. "You are quite right, I had no idea you observed so minutely: it is often in those little things that the secret of a likeness lies. But it is the expression of the face that reminds one of Lesley."

"I wonder what *her* story was," she said thoughtfully, as she looked at the portrait.

"I can't tell you; but I can tell you who she was. She was Jane the wife of Wilfrid Hawthorn who died in seventeen hundred and eighty four, and she died in seventeen hundred and ninety and left a married daughter who died a few years later, childless, and one scapegrace of a son, who must have been your friend's grandfather."

And he related to the surprised Marion that the

old gentleman who had built, or if not wholly built, bought and enlarged from a mere farmhouse to a goodly mansion, the house of Thorncroft—Hawthorncroft as he had called it after his own name—had had no near relations and, being of the crabbed and suspicious order of old gentlemen, had quarrelled with all his distant ones excepting one, Wilfrid Hawthorn, to whom indeed he had at one time intended to leave the bulk of his property. But Wilfrid died before him, and Wilfrid's son Conersley incurred supreme obloquy in the eyes of his ancient cousin, a believer in divine monarchic rights and a staunch upholder of all and any existing systems, by falling into that fever of the times in whose delirium men talked at random about the irresponsible right of the people, and the natural right to labour, and the inalienable right of every man to have a voice in the government of his country, and fraternity and equality, and the absurdity and wickedness of allowing social inequalities and privileged classes, and the duty of recognizing no rule but that of Liberty and Reason—those sublime abstractions

which mean everything and nothing at once. It is not alway, you see, what people say when they are delirious that makes their ravings so piteously ludicrous, but rather its inapplicability and confusion. It appeared that Conersley Hawthorn had had the frenzy strong upon him, and, joining to it that other frenzy of a youth which calls the unchecked turmoil of its passions freedom, he rushed into such excesses as not only alienated his punctilious cousin and godfather old Mr Hawthorn, but estranged from him his nearer kindred. After his mother's death it only remained for him to quarrel with his sister's husband a fresh and final time (which of course he made haste to do), to have no friend left him more. Therefore, when sore at heart and angry, complaining of unkindness and injustice shown him on all sides, he left England suddenly, no one knew whither he went. His sister, who had some lingering love for him, mostly for their mother's sake something for his own, had been the last person who saw him: she had found him one morning in the churchyard where their parents were buried, and he had

spoken a hurried good-bye of which she could only surely recall that he was moved and excited and that he had talked vehemently of going in search of truth and freedom. From what he had said then however and from a hint he had let drop once before, her conviction was that he had gone to join the new Republic in America, and not, as his enthusiasm for the then commencing revolution, might have made probable, to France. So Wilfrid Hawthorn's son disappeared, and Wilfrid Hawthorn's daughter died childless only a few years after. Old Mr Hawthorn had to look about for other heirs, and finally he divided his property between Maurice's great uncle, Maurice Conersley Maurice, who stood in the same degree of relationship to him as those, and sundry large bequests to charities. But out of affection for the memory of Wilfrid Hawthorn, whom, now that he was dead, he really valued highly, he would not entirely overlook his son, who might return some day, or at least be heard of, and he bequeathed to him and his children a certain five thousand pounds invested apart from the rest of his property and a

small farm, or rather a field or two with a cottage looking at them, near the town of Slugford (which of late years had become the ground on which stood a brewery and five small streets of small but respectable cottages). These to be made over whenever the rightful claimant appeared, but if neither Conersley Hawthorn nor lawful descendants of his should be forthcoming, naturally Maurice Conersley Maurice and his descendants were to their amount the richer. Due search had been made after the lost legatee, but no trace of him had ever been found and the possible claim upon them had long been looked on by the Maurices rather as a tradition of their family history than a real contingency, and as Maurice explained to excuse himself for not having sooner inquired into the coincidence of names, had made scarcely any impression on the mind of the present owner of Thorncroft. But this odd likeness between Lesley Hawthorn and the old portrait had reminded him of the story and he had directed his agent to put him in immediate possession of its particulars. "And

now," he said, "we have to see whether Mrs Hawthorn and her daughter can furnish any particulars that will tell us whether their Hawthorn who was guillotined was this Conersley Hawthorn or no."

"I can answer already for the name of Conersley," said Marion; "I have seen it signed in a letter to his wife when he seems to have been sent on some political mission by his club to Lyons, and there are letters to him addressed so. Besides, he was married in that name—they have papers that show that."

"We are coming to the proofs already then," answered Maurice. "And now will you undertake to inform them of this and ask them to produce any papers they may have bearing upon the question of descent. Don't let them fancy me antagonistic and insisting on minute links, you know. It's only to have a reasonable certainty, as a matter of duty in my position."

"Yes," said Marion, musingly. "It is a good thing for them that you are the person it rests with. But why not tell them yourself?"

"No, no, let me off that—it is unexpected news and they may want it *broken* to them for aught I know—Or, Miss Hawthorn is proud enough I fancy, she might take it into her head that I wanted to play the benefactor. I'd infinitely rather you would take it in hand for me if you will."

"Willingly," Marion agreed. "I see you are right; Lesley is suspicious of benefits, and I don't think you would quite know how to make her sure it is only her right you are going to put her in possession of."

It was an odd thing, but Maurice did not quite like Mrs Raymond's way of viewing the transaction. He was the last man to wish or to endure hero worship offered him for being ready to perform a simple act of justice, and when he had come to communicate his discovery to her he had been rather fidgetted by the apprehension that she would be moved and enthusiastic as he had seen her over the recital of what she considered a generous or lofty action; he would have been honestly annoyed by expressions of surprise and

admiration; but, though he had feared, he had expected them, and the entire absence of objection or remark concerning the pecuniary loss he was inflicting on himself and the matter-of-course way in which she took his conduct annoyed him with the notion of a careless want of appreciation and interest on her part. He did not see that it was because Marion did appreciate him in himself, and that so highly, that she made no marvel of his honourable dealing. In questions of honour and honesty it was more in her nature, indeed, to be scornful of any shortcoming than to regard performance as calling for any especial praise; but what Maurice was doing would have called forth approval from her in some lower man; in him she felt that anything less anxiously just was not to be thought possible. She was irritated at hearing expressions of admiration about it. "What is there surprising?" she asked, petulantly. "Do you suppose Mr Maurice could have rested a day in quiet possession of what he had come to think didn't belong to him?" "What! even you!" she said to Durne. "You don't seem to me to choose a good

time for first taking to laudations. Mr Maurice must be flattered to find his friends so pleased with the discovery that he is an honourable man. You had better get up a testimonial to him, 'Presented by the old friends of Maurice Maurice, esq. in token of their surprise and delight at finding him capable of an act of justice.'"

Lesley took the proffer of restitution from much the same point of view: Mrs Hawthorn's agitation was too extreme for her to think clearly on the matter, but Lesley, when she had comprehended it, said to her friend Marion, "Is Mr Maurice a rich man?"

"He has, I think, between three and four thousand a year—I don't quite know. At first he had only three hundred a year that came from his father, but his two cousins were drowned by the upsetting of a boat on the Lake of Geneva, and his poor old uncle, who, I believe, died of grief, made him heir of all he had; but they said the eldest son, Conersley Maurice, had been extravagant and lessened his father's property very much, so that it wasn't so much at his death as had been

expected. But if he had only half that, Lesley, do you think he could bear to keep back anything of other people's rights? Just put yourself in his place. *You* have nothing to do with whether he is rich or poor, if that's what you mean."

"Yes, that was what I meant. But I see it must be left with him—that is, if it is found that the papers we have make out the proofs sufficiently. Only is there not something in law about interest, accumulations? Do not let him pay them, Marion; that ought not to be."

"Lesley, I don't know in the least what is due to you by that bequest, but be sure that whatever you could justly claim, if you were claiming and not he offering, he *will* restore to you. *I* can't ask him to do anything self-interested."

"No," said Lesley. "But"—

"Look, Lesley; he disclaims all idea of setting up for a benefactor, and he is aware of your little pet sin of pride and won't aggrieve you by offering you the least particle more than your right. Leave it in his hands for the present—you can trust him, I think."

"Yes," Lesley answered, "I do trust him, to the utmost."

That was all she said of him; she and Marion were both agreed in their simple, "It is like him," for all comment and praise. But her trust in him grew from that time out of mere belief into faith, warm living woman's faith. She did hero-worship to him in her inmost heart, and at times it even spoke out of her eyes—very noticeably to Marion, who understood it, and not unnoticed by Maurice, who did not understand it but found it vaguely pleasant.

The Hawthorns having thus happily been made aware of their new prospects, next the scrutiny and comparing of the letters and documents in their possession was begun. The investigation was brief and conclusive; there were few missing links, none whose absence could lessen the certainty of the fact. There was no possible doubt that Lesley Desirée, the daughter of Wilfrid Desirée Hawthorn and granddaughter of Conersley Hawthorn, was granddaughter of that Conersley Hawthorn who had lost the estate of Thorncroft by his vagaries

and to whom that bequest of the five thousand pounds and the Slugford farm in lieu thereof had been recorded in vain. So Mrs Hawthorn and her daughter became well-to-do people, rich people in their own estimation. Not a moment of unnecessary delay would Maurice allow in acquitting himself of his debt towards them.

"If it had only come a year sooner!" Lesley thought to herself for one moment. Only one moment, for then she knew that though she might perhaps have been happily married to Louis de l'Aubonne and, that one temptation having been removed out of his way, never have known the extent of his moral weakness, yet, since he was not what she had thought, there must one day, whether by slow degrees or by sudden revelation, have come a mournful awakening—the wife's hard question to her heart, to the treacherous pleasant Past, to the saddened Present, and the lowering Future, "Is this my true husband? This is not the man I loved, not the man I married."

But for her mother's sake Lesley would have found scant cause for rejoicing in her new posi-

tion. For herself she had already all that she needed, and she was pleased to look on herself as a real worker, as really earning her livelihood in the working-day world; no dilettante dallyings in her life, no playings at her craft, no painting leisurely in her own boudoir and selling now and then, for the benefit of some charity bazaar, a half-thought picture all "effect" and "touches:" she liked to feel her art the duty of her days as well as their underlying interest. Once, for love of Louis de l'Aubonne, she had been willing to lose the completeness of her artist life, but for less than love she was not prepared to do it. And she had an idea that this new inheritance would somehow bring her into social bondage. "I know it will take away my self-reliance," she said to Marion; "it will change my life, I shall be a drawing-room fine lady instead of a work-woman. I wanted to make my fortune, and it has come to me."

"Never mind, you are but a poor woman yet," returned Marion, laughing; "you'll find it out soon as your ideas of expenditure enlarge. And

if you don't work for the dear necessity of living now, you discontented child, work because, God having given you a gift, it is your duty to use it."

"It is true," answered Lesley, meekly; "His gifts bring with them the motive to use them, because they are His and for their own sake. And I am selfish, too, to regret too much that *I* have not earned this comfort for my mother—she has it so much the sooner because it has not come through me."

"I understand your feeling, Lesley; you had a pet dream of being your mother's providence and it has been taken from you. But there is a selfishness in it too, as you say. Let God send His good to those we love, and don't let us fret because He hasn't sent it through us. That wanting to be a providence leads us wrong sometimes, Lesley—I tried it once—not by honest work though, as you did; but by a—well, a *sin*, I think. I am still expecting my punishment for it—but I don't think any lower temptation could have brought me to it."

"It *is* a temptation, Marion, you are right—

but it was not wonderful that you should deceive yourself, such a child as you were—that is, if I know what you mean; I think I know it, Marion, do not be vexed at me."

"Deceive! yes," said Marion, moodily; "but no woman is overcome finally by that deception without fault, great fault. I can't think why I was allowed to find my husband so good and so considerate, and to be so much happier than I deserved in such a marriage."

"But," she resumed lightly, "this has nothing to do with this great misfortune that has come upon you—you really must resign yourself to it with your natural patience. Only think how much worse it might have been. If all the estate had been left to your grandfather!"

Lesley laughed out, Marion's mock horror was irresistible. "That would have been fatal, I should not have survived it many days. Lesley Desirée Hawthorn the heiress would have had to put on mourning for poor Lesley Desirée Hawthorn the artist."

But at present there seemed no likelihood of

any such severance; the girl absorbed herself more than ever in her artist-life. How much she forgot and all she possessed in it only herself could know, but her friend Marion Raymond felt that she had in it her best shelter from the stormy love with which she was assailed, had in it the lullaby from the tumult in her own heart. Lesley was still taking chloroform.

CHAPTER XI.

PAUL TELLS LIES.

ALL at once Louis de l'Aubonne retired from the field. He forced himself into Lesley's presence one day in a frenzy bordering on madness, reproached her with having deceived him, and, with a burst of anguish, bewailed the terrible destruction of his last delusion. "Ange dechue," he called her, and wept over her degradation. Then he contradicted himself; no, she had been false from the very beginning, infamous and unworthy, he cursed the day when he had first seen that face so pure, so noble, so little indicative of her perfidious corrupted soul.

Lesley was frightened at his violence; she thought his reason was leaving him and contented herself

with desiring him, in the calmest tone she could assume, to leave her.

"Yes," he answered fiercely, "I leave you, and it is for ever. Follow the course you have chosen, perfidious woman; never shall I cross your path again. But, if I sink before this humiliation, remember that you are guilty of my death."

He turned from her as he spoke and was gone. Days went by and she did not see him: she was free then at last, yet she was uneasy. If he should have lost his reason, and she the unhappy cause! Lesley's love, which had survived that great wrong of her marriage and the knowledge of Louis's subsequent engagement, living on with a sorrowful pitying forgiveness, was fast dying out, if not indeed already dead, under the ordeal of his second wooing. But not the less was her present dread too great to be borne.

She confided it to Marion; Marion she thought could discover the truth from Paul de l'Aubonne.

"Nothing easier," said Marion; "it is only to indulge him with a tête-à-tête and ask him how

his brother's love affairs get on—he has told me his version of matters already—he will be ready enough to tell anything he knows more."

She put her scheme into practice on the first opportunity. It had been impossible for Louis long to conceal his whereabouts and his proceedings from his anxious brother, and he had finally made him, as usual, the confidant of his adventures. Paul was contradictory on this particular subject, but he was sympathising; he argued and persuaded, but he also cheered and condoled, and he could be trusted to give no hint of it in the quarter where it might be dangerous to have it known and to be ready to support him to the utmost against any suspicions there; Paul never did things by halves for those he loved.

"And your brother, is he as madly in love as ever?" asked Marion.

"Yes and no," replied Paul, prompt to speak upon a theme which was engrossing so much of his thought. "Yes and no, Madame—both. He raves about the young girl, who apparently by a clever coquetry and holding back has made him

desperate, but he will see her no more, he no longer wishes to marry her."

"All the better for her, I should say. But what has altered his mind? Something you have persuaded him?"

"Yes, Madame, I have finally succeeded, I have saved him; I have done my duty to him and to his family in bringing him back at last to his duty."

"And how did you manage it, if one may ask?"

"Ma foi, Madame, I told him lies," said Paul pleasantly.

"What!" exclaimed Marion in simple amazement.

"Oui, Madame, je lui ai dit des mensonges," repeated Paul, no whit abashed, "des calomnies, que voulez vous?"

"Calomnies! lies!" reiterated Marion, bewildered and horrified. "Are you in earnest? What did you tell him?"

"I told him things against her reputation," Paul replied; "it was necessary to persuade him that she was not a person to marry."

"But did you know—had you ever heard anything against her?" asked Marion, flushing fire.

"No, because I know nothing of her at all."

"And you mean to say that you have dared, that you have disgraced yourself to do such a shameful thing, to take away the good name of an innocent woman by *lies?*"

"Madame takes it too seriously," said Paul, put thus upon his defence. "These things make no difference to a person in her position."

"No difference! No difference to an innocent woman to have her reputation trampled under foot, to be blackened by slanders and lying inventions! And you say I take it too seriously!"

"Yes, Madame, you take it too seriously—you do not understand that I have only taken for granted things that might easily be verified. I should not have used these inventions of which you complain if I had not been aware that under the circumstances there must exist facts resembling them."

"What circumstances, M. de l'Aubonne?"

"Those which I have gathered from my brother himself, the antecedents of the young person, the poverty in which she was when she found him, and her present manner of living and dressing in her humble position—a position which of itself forebodes"—

"Position! why she is"—Marion interrupted herself and went on hurriedly—"You have condemned yourself, M. de l'Aubonne, even if you had probabilities to bear out your assertions; yes, if you could find actual proofs of them, for you spoke them knowing them to be *lies*. But do you know that an Englishman would knock a man down who should accuse him of a lie."

"And I too, Madame, I should resent it—Parbleu! if any one dared!" said Paul, firing up at the suggested insult. "But this case is one which you mistake, Madame; I have said nothing beyond what the truth must almost inevitably be, the young person will suffer no injury if it was true that she was not willing to marry him, and I have saved my brother from outraging his family and compromising his honour, which was publicly en-

gaged to Mlle. de la Chatellerie. Yes, I have done right."

"Done right! You have been guilty of untruth and slander and you can think you have done right?"

"Certainly, Madame: I have done right to prevent my brother by any means, whatever they might be, from disgracing his name. You think nothing then of his breaking with his family and betraying the engagement into which he has entered with a noble and highly-considered young lady," remonstrated Paul, beginning to feel aggrieved at this construction of his conduct.

"Ah, M. de l'Aubonne, are right and wrong undistinguishable then?" Marion answered hotly. "Will a good purpose justify a crime? Oh yes, you look astonished, but it is a crime. How could you perpetrate such a cruelty against a defenceless girl? M. de l'Aubonne, undo it; retract your terrible accusations—if you have the least justice, the least honour, you will tell your brother that you spoke them without other grounds than your wishes."

"And have him rush to throw himself at her feet on the moment," said Paul, shrugging his shoulders. "No, Madame, pardon me, I do justice to your talent and your wit as much as to your beauty even, but you have not, happily, a man's appreciation of these matters."

"Ah, what an unworthy appreciation!" exclaimed Marion. But she saw that it was in vain to hope to bring Paul de l'Aubonne to share her opinion on the subject, and for Lesley's sake she hushed her anger, willing to refrain from extremes until she could decide how it would serve her best to deal with him.

As to Paul he forgave Mrs Raymond; he had admired her indignation too much to be greatly nettled by it, and he accepted her rebukes as a gallant man should the petulances of a pretty woman given to high-flown vagaries: it was not in him, at any rate, to bear malice long to any one and still less to a lady. He allowed her to turn the conversation, and chatted on with wonted vivacity; and, if Mrs Raymond did seem absent and indifferent, he was too much accustomed to

her fitfulness and too persuaded of her general amiability to attribute it to continued displeasure. "She is delicious, with her vehemence and her anger, this beautiful widow," he said to himself and to any one who would discuss her with him.

He left Mrs Raymond in a difficulty. That he should retract his false statements against her guileless Lesley she was resolved, but, bound as she was to assist in concealing her friend's identity with the heroine of his brother's embroiled love-plot, she could not design the method of achieving her purpose.

"If you would only let me tell some one who could act for you, Lesley," she urged. "Mr Maurice—or perhaps your cousin is the right person."

Lesley, as was but natural, had had a good cry over the cruel information Marion had been obliged to give her, but she had regained her quiet and was resolutely disdainful of the slander. She was not inclined to descend from the height of her pride to notice it, and she would still shelter her-

self from the annoying publicity Paul's recognition of her would give her story: she had her fair argument too against this proposal.

"Poor good-natured Herbert," she said smiling. "Neither his judgment nor his French would bear him through such an embassy. He would take my part by a bodily assault upon M. Paul willingly and successfully, but he could do no more. Nothing but harm could come from his interference."

"Mr Maurice then—let me consult *him*, Lesley. Don' tbe obstinate."

"I would, Marion, if it were necessary—yes, when Louis was still persecuting me I have been ready more than once to burst out with 'Oh help me!' to Mr Maurice and tell him all my trouble. But not now that I am safe. Let Louis de l'Aubonne think ill of me—if he can—I am not much afraid of that possibility."

"Oh Lesley, darling, he can think ill even of you if he is told discreditable things of you as absolute facts, and what Paul de l'Aubonne has said already he will repeat to him again, and before others perhaps—we can't tell where the slander

may stop. Do listen to me. And since you have thought already of asking Mr Maurice to protect you from all this why not let it be done now? I will take it upon myself."

"No, no, you must not, indeed you must not. When I had that wild wish it was when I had what I could not bear forced upon me always and always. I can bear this; I shall know nothing of it. And"—

"Yes?"

"You forget that Mr Maurice would doubt me; he has accepted a false version of my conduct in the beginning."

"The more reason for giving him the true. Why should he think harm of you unjustly?"

"No, let him think it, I ought not to mind it too much. But I could not bear to throw myself on his kindness and find him cold and suspicious."

"He would not be," Marion assured her; but it was in vain. She gave up that point and suggested M. Gueret.

No, Lesley did not think his intervention would be successful, and as Marion had a strong sus-

picion, founded on some arch innuendoes of Paul de l'Aubonne's on the only occasion when he had met Gueret at her house, that he would use that worthy man's name in his fabrications to his brother, she silently allowed Lesley's objection.

"But one thing I can do," said Lesley triumphantly; "now that I know Louis de l'Aubonne is with his brother I can send him back this ring."

"That will bring him back to you again."

"No, he will accept it now." There was a sadness in Lesley's voice which touched Marion.

"Lesley, darling, do you regret him?"

"No," she said. "I should never have listened to him, I had ceased even to regret that I could not; but we ought not to have parted *thus*."

"Lesley, however you had parted there could have been no friendship between you afterwards."

"No, but he should have respected me." And there was bitterness in the girl's tears of humiliation.

But not the more for that was she to be persuaded. It never was easy to persuade Lesley out

of a decision; she had been self-willed from babyhood, and the necessity of self-reliance that had always been upon her had not been calculated to lessen the independence of character which was at once her strength and her weakness.

It was in vain that Marion reiterated with emphasis, "It cannot last so, Paul de l'Aubonne must identify you, you cannot escape it." Lesley only answered, "Then why hasten a sure event? And he will not retract his calumnies any the more for that, if they serve the purpose." And when Marion, trying a last argument, pointed out to her that now the brothers were reunited and would be about together she ran every risk of meeting them unawares, Lesley only said, "I shall not be afraid of them."

Marion gave it up in despair. She was neither allowed to act in the matter herself nor to call in the aid of better qualified persons, and Paul's inventions were to be left in full play, to reach no one knew where.

"Oh, Lesley," she complained, "if you had only heard Mr Maurice admiring the gentle yielding-

ness and confidingness of your ways, last night, you would be ashamed to deserve the praise so little. Why you are downright pigheaded."

"However," she presently consoled herself, "I can make my friend Paul de l'Aubonne give his opinion of Miss Hawthorn before other people, and have them for witnesses of the little he really knows of you when the whole comes out. And I shall make M. Gueret relate his story of M. Louis de l'Aubonne's fine wedding to anybody that will listen to him long enough to make out what it is about: I shall ask him to tell it to Mr Maurice on the very first opportunity."

"No, let the matter rest," pleaded Lesley; "it is painful to think of its being talked about."

And even here Mrs Raymond was to fail; for Gueret, on being appealed to, assured her that he had already had the wish to explain the circumstance correctly to Mr Maurice, a duty which he had not had the opportunity of performing on the occasion of M. de l'Aubonne's illness in London, but that Mlle. Lesley had, when she offered him the honour of an introduction to Mde. Ray-

mond and her circle, so bound him to absolute silence on every point of that history that he was not at liberty without her consent, a consent which she was still unwilling to give, to relate any portion of those, for her, distressing events. And as to Paul de l'Aubonne no opportunity of compromising him in the way she wished offered itself to her eagerness. Still she continued persistent in mind. "He shall be brought to contradict it," she said to herself, "that slander shall not stand." She was reckless and excited beyond all understanding of the uninitiated lookers on, puzzling Miss Raymond, puzzling Durne, and fairly angering Maurice, while she gave herself up to her anxiety to remove this wrong out of her friend's way.

Lesley thought she could carry out her own intention simply. She enclosed her once wedding-ring in an envelope to be sent to Paul for his brother, and wrote with it four lines of farewell: they were—

"I return you this ring, which is yours, not mine. I thank you for your promise that you

will henceforth leave me in peace; I beg you to observe it, and I assure you finally of my forgiveness.

"LESLEY DESIRÉE HAWTHORN."

But when it was written, she perceived that the signature would betray her to Paul if he should see it, as it was probable that he would. She wrote her note over again and signed only the name by which Louis had chosen to know her in the old days, "Desirée"—no, that she certainly did not think good, it looked like a recall, as if she would move him by the recollection of bygone tenderness. Besides it was her fancy to look upon the returning this ring as an act of important and final meaning, and she felt under a necessity of formalising it by the use of her legal signature.

It was of no great moment in reality, but it was part of Lesley's character to attach great consequence to apparent trifles from a kind of symbolism which she gave them in her own mind.

So the second note also was destroyed and Lesley paused to consider. It took her a day or two to determine that she would not conceal her-

self as if she were ashamed, she would use her true signature, she was not Desirée any more to Louis de l'Aubonne, that familiar name had no meaning between them now. If Paul must recognise her, well let it be; as well that way as some other, she thought, remembering Marion's prognostications, and it was not for her to condescend on his account to any change in what she would have done. So at last she wrote again the same cold determined phrases, signed again Lesley Desirée Hawthorn, and, when she had posted her missive with her own hands and knew it was soon to be at its destination, sat down relieved in mind to think that at last she was free, free from even the fancy of that false bond whose signet she had sent back, and free from the hateful feeling of concealment which she had been keeping to humiliate and fret her.

She had not for a moment thought of denying the imputations against her; that would have been beneath her, she had to make no defence on such an arraignment, let Louis de l'Aubonne do that for her. If not, the shame of the belief

remained with him. And already she thought, "If Paul de l'Aubonne's calumnies have not altogether killed Louis's love, such as it was, at least they have killed the last lingerings of love in me—for Louis could believe them!"

CHAPTER XII.

MARION'S GRAND BALL.

RALPH Annesley had so overwhelmed his sister with fulminations against the profanity of dancing that she, in sheer desperation, had issued cards for a large private ball. It took place the day after Lesley's little packet was despatched, and the girl, suddenly jubilant in her feeling of freedom—all the more, doubtless, for the conviction that Louis de l'Aubonne had lost his last hold over her heart—threw herself into the as yet unfamiliar pleasure with a completeness that astonished herself. It was so pleasant to be sought and admired, and she could not help being aware that as she passed a great many were finding out that she was beautiful, and she could not help feeling a woman's delight in the new consciousness, and she felt the

entrancement of light and music and the glow and excitement of the dance till she fairly laughed for joy and swept on buoyantly in the whirl in a mood as happy and careless as if sorrow had never folded her in her lean arms with her claiming "Child of mine!"

A good many ball-room admirers crowded round Miss Hawthorn, she was so lovely and so joyous and so natural and she danced so well. And not a few were desirous of making the acquaintance of the painter of the Rizpah, and spoke approvingly of the promise of the girl artist who, young as she was, was already of some note. And altogether Lesley's attention was so fully occupied that she had no time to think if Paul de l'Aubonne were in the room or to wonder that he came so late from Madame d'Angelier's great musical soirée. She forgot him, and neither watched for his entrance nor observed it.

But Mrs Raymond had not forgotten him and did observe. And she saw that he was accompanied by a tall distinguished looking young man of a noticeable likeness to him, but dark and hag-

gard-faced with wearied black eyes deep sunken and rimmed underneath with shadowy violet semicircles, and a strangely troubled look. She knew at a glance that this was Louis de l'Aubonne, the next glance was sent in search of Lesley. Had she seen him? No, she was floating by in a waltz, with a happy flush on her cheeks and a laugh on her lips, unaware of the presence that was menacing her. But in a few minutes Louis de l'Aubonne must certainly catch sight of her and there would be some painful scene and a nine-days' wonder sent abroad to drag the girl's name through the mire of all the gossipries in that gossipping capital.

No, Marion would not have it so; as yet she was surely sufficiently mistress of the situation to make matters go her way, a better one at least than that. So promptly and so naturally that no one could have suspected her of a covert design she moved onwards to stop the progress of her dangerous guest.

"Ah!" she said, smiling, to Paul, "you have come at the moment to be a messenger for me."

Paul of course was delighted, but understanding that he was first to answer the enquiry in his hostess's eyes, he hastened to present his brother, "whom," he said, "I have persuaded that you would receive him favourably and pardon the intrusion which is prompted by the desire to make the acquaintance of a lady of whom he has heard so much praise."

Marion accepted the introduction courteously. "Your brother comes as a stranger among us," she said to Paul.

Louis answered, "My brother persuades me that I have been indeed too long a stranger in society. It is to satisfy him that I intend to seek from it once more a relief from my own oppressive company."

"I will bear the oppression with you for the moment," said Marion, laughing; "for I shall ask you to be my escort to the gallery while M. Paul de l'Aubonne carries my message."

She wrote a few words on the ivory ball-tablets suspended from her wrist, and unfastening them delivered them to Paul: "Give them quietly to

Miss Hawthorn," she told him in a low voice, "and come to find me with her, if she will."

Paul found some difficulty in working his way to Lesley, but at last reached her where she stood in a window embrasure, pausing a minute from the dance. She started and flushed as she made out Marion's message, but the next moment there was no sign of agitation as she said lightly, "Mrs Raymond is despotic, but I shall obey her." She was in such high spirits that evening that she felt able to face anything.

She turned to her partner with a smile, "Mr Maurice, please, may I go? Mrs Raymond particularly wants me."

"I really don't know that I can allow such a misdemeanour," said Maurice, returning her smile; "unless indeed you promise to accept the punishment I inflict and give me the very first free dance on your list."

Lesley even stopped to arrange that engagement, so well did she retain her self-possession—perhaps too she was not sorry to gain a little time for preparation.

"But I shall have the pleasure of taking you to Mrs Raymond," suggested Maurice, claiming his right as partner.

"No, not that—should we venture to disobey Marion? See, on this tablet:" she showed him a leaf on which was written, "I think my arrangement the best, so hope you'll come with P. de l'Aubonne."

Paul wondered at the sudden silence which had fallen upon his companion as he conducted her through the throng; but for the sprightly way in which she had left her partner he would have thought she accompanied him unwillingly, but under the circumstances he concluded that the mishap of one of the fragile skirts catching against another damsel's bracelet as she passed and leaving a fluttering cobweb upon it had destroyed her peace of mind. He endeavoured to restore it by a few compliments on her exquisite toilette and the admiration her graceful movements in the dance excited, but the young lady answered in such a haphazard and laconic manner that he abandoned the attempt with something as near ill humour as

he could entertain against a feminine offender and a beautiful one.

There was a short wide corridor, one side of which was nearly all windows, connecting two suites of apartments belonging to Mrs Raymond's household. It had been her pleasure to convert this into a kind of conservatory, and it was at all times luxuriant and fragrant with the choicest plants which could flourish there: one or two statues—not many, for Marion objected to "a crowd of stone company," as she objected to all superfluity of decoration—had found appropriate places in this dainty retreat, and there were cages of love-birds and other not vociferous feathered pets—canaries she forbad on account of their shrieking propensities. To night she had had this gallery lighted, not too brilliantly but into a soft tremulous twilight, and it was open to the guests as one of those cool resting nooks which would be so delicious if people could only go into them, but which being suspicious to the general eye remain untenanted, excepting by now and then a stray couple of intrepid votaries of têtes-à-têtes

who are prepared to bid defiance to censorship and to ridicule.

It was here that the spider Marion was in wait for that giddy-winged unsuspecting fly, Paul de l'Aubonne. When she saw him enter the gallery with Lesley still on his arm she said quickly to Louis, "M. de l'Aubonne, I beg, I insist, that you keep silence a minute." Then she advanced to meet them, Louis following her no little bewildered.

Marion's warning had been well-timed, for when she gave it Louis had not yet recognized, had indeed scarcely perceived Lesley Hawthorn; and it was while yet under the surprise of that singular and peremptory command that he knew that this gossamer-robed lady who, with a kind of defiant movement, drew her arm from his brother's the instant they entered and moved along by him so haughtily, was his once playful simple Desirée. She came on quickly to the meeting, but she never once looked at him; she fixed her eyes inquiringly on Marion only.

There was no time for her or for him to speak,

Marion had resolved to have the first word. "M. de l'Aubonne," she said to Paul in her usual manner, determined not to set him on his guard, "it is an odd request, but I wish you so much to say out plainly what you think of this young lady—my friend."

"What I think! But one does not think, every one *feels* that Mademoiselle is charming." Paul was in some embarrassment from the oddness of the position in which Mrs Raymond was placing him, but his gallantry was always to the rescue.

"You mistake me," Marion said gravely; "I ask you to speak because I have heard that she has lately been spoken of lightly, worse than lightly."

"What an infamy!" interjaculated Paul, with hearty indignation.

"Therefore," she continued, "I wish to ask you whether you have ever heard anything to her discredit."

"Never, Madame, never, on my honour; I swear to you that no one has dared in my hearing, and no one shall dare, to speak of her with less than the respect she merits."

Louis sprang forward. "But what is this mystery—"

"Wait," Marion said to him. "M. Paul de l'Aubonne will answer *me* first."

"By your honour, and before God," she asked of Paul, in a subdued passionate calm, "do you yourself know or believe anything of Lesley Hawthorn that can do her dishonour or make her unworthy to be the wife of the most honourable man you know?"

"No. A thousand times, no," responded Paul. He was so unprepared to recognize in the rich and highly placed Mrs Raymond's cherished friend the "adventuress" of his story, that it was simply impossible for him to divine that he himself was the false accuser whom he was answering, so hot in her defence.

"My God! what does this mean?" exclaimed Louis, terribly agitated.

"Ask your brother," answered Marion, indignantly; "let *him* explain on what authority rest those slanders which he told you. But I will tell you this much, that he has met Lesley Hawthorn,

my dearest and most trusted companion, time after time at my house, and that he has known her, as he has just said in your own hearing, as one worthy of all respect—and only as my friend has he known her, by an extraordinary blindness he has up to this very moment failed to recognise in her the innocent girl who was called your wife for one unfortunate hour. After that, ask him where or how he has learned one jot against her."

Here was a denouement! Paul stood thunderstruck, while Louis was exclaiming with a wild lament, "Paul, oh Paul, what hast thou done? Thou hast ruined me!" Lesley stood motionless and sad, like the marble Pity behind her.

"There has been talk enough, M. de l'Aubonne, about *your* ruin and *your* sorrows," said the impetuous Marion, who, finding the field left clear for her, was moved with a strong impulse to do battle. "How long has it been that we are to pity the murderer because his intended victim has escaped him? You pity yourself too much, I think; there is room, is there not, for a little thankfulness that you were saved from committing a great

crime, though it *was* against your will? And your pity is mistaken too; pity yourself because you have had the misfortune to forget God's truth and man's honour, and to plan and half carry out the basest wrong against this trusting girl who was so true in her love to you that could have been devised by the lowest swindler—such a one, M. de l'Aubonne, as the bearer of your high name is not supposed to honour with so much as a look. Do you not think you might pity her a little too?"

Louis looked so helplessly at her when she paused that she was disarmed at once. Her heart smote her for her harshness when she saw the startled heart-broken look on his wan face, and her anger had passed suddenly into compassion. Besides, Lesley was saying in her quiet sad voice, "Marion, let us speak no more of that. M. de l'Aubonne knows I have forgiven it. There is nothing left to question between him and me now."

So she turned from him, the more hastily that she was conscious of a foolish desire to speak him

some consoling word, and she listened to the excuses Paul was beginning to remember for his own conduct—listened hardly hearing at first, then with impatience. All at once she stopped him in the midst of a phrase with "M. Paul de l'Aubonne, make us no more excuses. The only true one you have we will allow you; your love for your brother is so great that it blinded you. You have made evil come out of good, that is all. But you cannot make evil good again by talking. Do not try it longer."

And Lesley still said, "Marion, let us say no more. There is nothing left between us to say."

But their turning to go was the signal for one of Louis's bursts of passion, and there followed a cruel scene. He was like a child in the petulance of his importunity, like a woman in his storms of anguish. And through his bitterest grief and his fondest pleadings Lesley stood distressed and pitying but never for a moment relenting, and Marion looking in her face saw something like contempt growing out of its weariness.

Marion herself was unhappy. She had gained

her object, she had had justice done to Lesley Hawthorn, and she had saved her from an interview with Louis de l'Aubonne at which half the guests of the evening would have assisted; but she could not triumph in her success with that wild sorrow before her. It seemed as if she somehow were guilty of it, and it was greater than she could bear; for with her vivid sympathy she was not pitying it but *compassionating* it, feeling its reflex in her own moved heart. She would have liked to take his hand tenderly in hers and bid him be comforted and trust her that all should come right. She would have liked—she who had always dreaded the possibility of Lesley's yielding to a dangerous love and sacrificing the best life in her to this wild wooer—she would have liked to fold Lesley in her arms and say, Forgive, and Forgive, till she yielded and plighted her troth again to Louis de l'Aubonne. It was hard work to be mistress of herself and look on tearless and stern.

And a less thing than this unhappy Louis's suffering sent a quicker little pang through her.

It was strange that Marion Raymond, who in her own person had always borne disappointment so stoutly, had the intensest sympathy for disappointment in any one else. No matter in how slight a thing, no matter how soon forgetable, the dull shade of disappointment falling suddenly upon the brightness of pleasant expectations was to her most painful to witness or to understand. Once in her early childhood she had been at play with some little schoolfellows and some of the elder ones had proposed one of those impromptu dramas in which children rejoice. They had bidden her choose a name for herself, and she, with her little head full of her favourite Shakespeare, had suggested Desdemona, at which unusual sound the others had so jeered and flouted her that the little maid withdrew from the game pouting and indignant. So as the small personages played their self-invented parts, one and the other had a scoff at "Miss Desdemona, who had stayed away because she was too grand to be spoken to;" and fiery Marion, provoked beyond her small patience, rushed to the drawing-room and poured out her

troubles. They were forgotten in a little while and she happy in her book, when there was a sound of little feet stamping their hardest and of a straggling chorus of little voices not too precise about time or unison, and in came a motley procession adorned with odds and ends of worn-out frippery, all the merry faces flushed with delight and expectation of applause. Marion never forgot the pain and remorse that struck to her heart as she saw the light suddenly die out of the happy eyes and a dull gloom come upon the laughing faces when the grown-up people looked severely at them and refused to have anything to say to the procession of such naughty unkind children. Perhaps it was the recollection (never effaced through her life) of that young impression of hers, perhaps it was the distinct personification of disappointment which the instantaneous change from elation to depression in that childish group formed in her mind, that disposed her to see such pathos in any joyous anticipation thwarted, but few things moved her more, and when the anticipation had been one that was joyous in procuring some plea-

sure to another Marion's sensitiveness felt a sore wound.

And Paul de l'Aubonne had greeted her with such a joyous smile, he had been so pleased to bring his brother to her house that night, fancying that he was to see him partly forget his trouble in the excitement of all that brilliancy and movement, and he had gone on her message with such alacrity, glad to do her even that little service, and he had hoped too afterwards that he was being called on as Lesley's champion and had been eager to respond to that appeal. And all this rejoicing good-nature Marion had darkened in a moment. There was Paul, ordinarily so bright and pleasant-humoured, with his face the picture of mortification, full of trouble for his brother and self-reproach for bringing him into such a situation, and ready to cry for vexation, while she must not console him even if she could.

It was a positive relief to her when Louis became so extravagant as to force her into indignation again, for so she was able to accomplish the interference she felt to be necessary for Lesley's sake.

"M. de l'Aubonne," she exclaimed, "there must be an end to this! I will not have Miss Hawthorn harassed and insulted in my house.—Let her go free, or I shall call in interference which may be more humiliating to you than mine."

"What interference?" asked Louis, with a bitter laugh. "Who has a right to interfere between me and my wife?"

"Not your wife!" said Lesley. "Never your wife!"

"My wife before God, my wife, Desirée, my wife—"

"Nonsense!" broke in Marion. "Be reasonable, M. de l'Aubonne. You have no claim whatever over her. Pray how do you propose to establish that marriage, M. de l'Aubonne? can you prove it one?"

"Proof! you ask me for proof! Will she deny that she declared me her husband before the altar, by the ceremony of her own church! Yes, has she not even now the marriage ring which she would have returned because it witnessed against her and which—"

"Which I *have* returned," said Lesley. "M. Paul de l'Aubonne, why have you kept back my letter?"

"Parbleu!" ejaculated Paul. "It is true, I *have* a letter for thee, Louis. But it is not that I have kept it back; it came last night, dost thou see, when I was going out—where have I put it then? It should have been in this pocket—no—yes—no—Oh," he was searching for it in his coat: "no, again—ah! here it is. Why should I keep it back, I pray you? I knew nothing about it, or from whom it came; it was forgotten."

"I will not take it," Louis declared, strenuously. "I refuse it, absolutely. Give it to her, to Desirée."

"At any rate I disembarrass myself of it," said Paul, as he placed it in Lesley's hand before she was aware. Her fingers closed on it involuntarily.

Louis, who had discovered by her eagerness to return him the unlucky ring what importance she attached to its restitution and had come to share her fanciful notion about it, was triumphant. "Thou hast it then, Desirée! my wife! thou hast it!"

She threw the letter from her, "I have it not—take it, it is yours, not mine."

No, Louis would not take it: there it lay, trampled by his movement of passion, and the scene seemed as far as ever from its close.

"This is child's play," said Marion, decidedly. "You are perfectly aware, M. de l'Aubonne, that this ring has no meaning whatever; but since you are so absurd as to decline taking it back, and Miss Hawthorn is so fanciful as to let the sight of it annoy her, I shall take it into my own possession now. I cannot allow that letter to remain there for the first comer to pick it up. M. de l'Aubonne, you can have it from me when you choose to claim it; Miss Hawthorn has no more to do with it."

"Come, Lesley," she went on, turning from him carelessly, "we shall be missed; these gentlemen have detained us too long already.—What still, Monsieur de l'Aubonne? we *will* go."

Louis gave way before her determination, and the two white figures swept away from him along the gallery and passed back into the world of light

and laughter, and he was left—to what bitterness of desolation! Not even Paul for friend now, for Paul had betrayed him, Paul had ruined his last hope.

"Louis, thou dost not forgive me?"

No answer.

"Louis, I did it for the best; I thought to serve thee."

"Thou hast lost me."

Poor Paul shivered at the angry tone. "My brother, we have always been friends."

"We are no friends now; we are strangers; we are apart for ever."

"And our mother?"

Paul said only that. There lay a world of tender pleading in that simple question: unconsciously the mother far away in her lonely home was to reconcile her sons.

Louis was touched: all Paul's thought went home to his heart, and in a moment he had cried out, "Oh Paul! oh my brother, I have but her and thee!" And they had pressed each other in an embrace which would have been very farcical

to English eyes coming upon them unawares in the gallery.

"Let us go," said Paul; "we can pass out unobserved through the crowd while they are dancing."

And, as they passed by, Lesley was already ringing out her little laugh as she talked with unwonted animation to Hugh Durne. Even then Louis would have spoken to her if his brother had not dragged him on. But "cœur de tigresse," muttered Paul between his teeth the while, for Lesley saw them and still talked on.

Ah well, how little we know what is passing in our neighbour's mind. He is sick and we call him dull, sorry and we call him cross; and, let him be ever so little of an actor, he has but to laugh in our face and we call him glad and light-hearted amid his bitterest secret thoughts; we throw him a jest the more and pass by unsuspicious of the wound we have grazed. What of it after all? Which of us would not rather have his sorrow to himself? Their wisdom and their wit and their mirth most men and women give

freely to their little world, but of their sorrow they say, It is my own, and hide it away carefully out of any one else's reach. Sometimes in our self-angers we call this hiding hypocrisy, but I do not think we, any of us, believe that in our hearts, we all know better what it means and sometimes we look with admiration on our own heroism; but then we surely forget that of every ten of the men and women moving round our lives nine may be as good as we and better too. For the real life of every human being is so secret that if you could watch each moment of a man's time for years you might yet not know it; and every *I* in the world is in the singular number, not to be made general by any man's logic or metaphysic.

Thus these two, Lesley Hawthorn and Hugh Durne, were making excellent fooling, each trying to be in the other's vein, and if they had only known a little each of them of how it stood with the other they might have talked the most lachrymose stuff in the world and thought it more truly sociable. For do you think that a young lady

who had just gone through such a scene with a man she had loved could be naturally in such high spirits as this one was exhibiting? And you must know that Durne had *his* thorn pricking under his waistcoat, pricking into what one would call his heart if he had not made it such a well established belief that he had none. He had come here to dance and look content at Mrs Raymond's ball because his mother and two of his sisters, who had recently arrived in Paris, came, and Lady Durne and the Honourable Florence and Emma would not have pardoned him if he had deprived them of his escort; but it was the last place in the world just then where it was well with him.

How had it happened? They were quite right who said Hugh Durne was not a marrying man, and Hugh Durne, when he had thought plainly over matters after Maurice's surprise had disclaimed any engagement between him and Mrs Raymond, had decided fairly with his own mind what he should say himself of any man of his income who devoted himself publicly

to a woman of her's, and had further decided that it was a case in which that lady would be more than sufficiently scornful. He had not the least intention of putting himself so far in her power; he was a man of distinct self-control, and he had entirely disallowed himself any suitorship to Marion Raymond, either in wish or in practice. How had it happened then that only the day before he had found himself the discomfited hero of a palpable love scene? It surprised him as much as it did Marion, but he was the victim of an opportunity presenting itself too suddenly to allow him time to resist the foolish impulse to use it. He had not exactly made an offer, but he had said what was sufficiently unmistakeable to force something beyond a hint of rejection from the downright Marion, and then he had answered, being "out of himself," as they say, for the moment, and told her—a good deal that he was ashamed of afterwards for its "heroics," so let it be his secret and Marion's still.

Whatever he said Marion Raymond did not

think it "heroics," but was his warm friend from that day, liking him with an entirely different appreciation from what she had had till then; although she had always said, "He is far better than he chooses to pass for."

But she had refused him for all that. And though that part of the affair did not surprise him, as her acceptance would have done, it was a disagreeable thing to bear, and he meant to leave the place of his blunder and his mortification behind him. He told Lesley that the English were mustering in such force in Paris now he was afraid of getting his French accent spoiled and was going to beat a retreat across the Channel immediately. She dissuaded him sportively, with a little kind earnest in it as she saw that he really intended to go. All at once he changed his tone. "Do *you* advise me to stay?" he said, with meaning.

Lesley was embarrassed; she felt why he asked her this, though Marion had kept strict silence. "Oh, I did not know," she said, hesitating. "Have I misled you? Perhaps I ought to advise you to

go then—but take no answer from me, I know none to give."

Maurice, who, coming near just then, had heard the latter part of their conversation, was annoyed at what he took to be a coquettish wile on Lesley's part. He had fancied once or twice lately that his friend Durne was dangerously attracted by the girl's subtle beauty, and he thought Durne's earnest question the confirmation of his suspicions. And he thought therefore that Lesley ought not to have been persuading him to stay, unless she could have answered that question by a simple yes—a yes which nevertheless Maurice would have heard with discontent; for since the affair of the inheritance he had chosen to look upon himself as a kind of guardian to Lesley Hawthorn, and he had considered uneasily lately that Durne's nature and hers could never harmonize. He feared that his friend would be almost as unappreciating a mate for her as even good-humoured froth-brained Herbert Lesley, who, he felt assured was, in spite of cousinship, in love after his fashion with his girl namesake—and with no sufficient evidence of dis-

couragement on her part to satisfy Maurice's wish for her. Maurice, who thought deceit the devil's hardest curse on the world and hated its smallest beginnings, began to be angry at the coquetry which seemed to him the first flaw in the girl's crystalline truth.

And thus I come back to my thought—how little we really know of our neighbour's mind. And we all shake our heads and agree, "Ah, yes—how little we really know of our neighbour's mind." Nevertheless some of us will presently make you a map of this never to be completely explored country much more definite than the rough travelling chart which is all we have to guide us to the tracks by which we should pass there—a map with the heights and the hollows and the courses of the running rivers and the shores of the sluggish lakes precisely marked. The only drawback is that the map cannot be verified and cannot be accurate; the height we seemed to discern might only be a white cloud, the sleeping lake a sea at rest in the calm or a vision of the mirage. But people who boast of understanding characters go on making such maps

complacently. They plan you a properly proportioned character, good or bad; they do it artistically, like the writer of a well-delineated novel; they balance the minor virtues and the minor defects, they subordinate these to the one indispensable ruling passion (whereas the greater number of people have no ruling passion at all but have a number of smaller ones clashing and counteracting), they dovetail the whole compactly, and there it is, a probable well worked out character. But there is a difficulty when you come to fit it to the supposed owner; it is ten to one that it cracks in a dozen places—a hundred as time goes on. How should the wiseacres be able to read the secret ciphers of God, the bound-marks and the measurements which He has set in the recesses of every man's soul? Some people indeed there are who, like Marion Raymond, gifted with the pain and the power of a quick sympathy, and content (understanding that the character of other human beings can never be a subject of exact science for them, since even their own remains to them an often-varying mystery) to feel with them and for them

instead of "studying" them, pass at times beneath the surface and know for a moment what the dumb soul is living in its secret place. But they perceive by revelation, not by dissection.

CHAPTER XIII.

MAURICE'S LITTLE LECTURE.

"MARION," said Lesley, "I shall not mind your telling some one—telling Mr Maurice, now."

"Yes?"

"Since the scene of last night I feel that there can be no secret now, and perhaps I am in need of some one like him to act for me."

"I meant to say something of the kind to you—only I didn't much think I should prevail. But, Lesley—we will tell him first, for he will be your best adviser—but we shall have now to make the story public, *our* story, for Paul de l'Aubonne certainly hasn't the gift of reticence and *his* story won't suit us."

"I suppose I must," said Lesley. "But I thought

if I put the matter in some friend's hands first—and my cousin Herbert is hardly discreet enough for me to look to him as anything more than a zealous champion."

"So I think. And Mr Maurice has a fancy, you know, to consider you as a kind of ward of his; he will be prompt to do anything that can be done. And M. Louis wants a man's handling; neither your mother nor I can pass for a protector."

"I see it," Lesley answered; and, resting her head on her hand, sat thinking again as before she had spoken.

"Lesley," Marion said after a little while, "are you thinking that you will agree to my plan?"

"I am thinking it, dear Marion, but I do not know."

"It would be better in every way. At any rate, if it were only to return again, come with me to Ormeboys and see about it. Your absence might break the spell over this mad lover of yours, and he might not annoy you again when you returned."

"He would follow me to England. He is still my husband there, he says."

"But you would be protected from him there till the law declared you free."

"Here the law already makes me free."

"But I want you to be an Englishwoman, and—" Marion was going to add, "at present you are not free to marry in England," but she stopped in time. That argument would inevitably have driven Lesley into opposition; and she saw also that it was best not to continue the discussion at this time, since its chief effect was to remind Lesley of her objections to the course which she had for a moment seemed willing to adopt. She turned the conversation back nearer the starting-point.

"Well, let us leave that question now; there will be other times for talking it over. But this one has to be settled—will you take heart of grace and tell Mr Maurice the story yourself? I wish you would—tell him as you told me."

"No, *please*—you do it."

And Marion could not for dear life have answered anything but yes to the entreating tone and the pleading eyes: few people were able to gainsay a prayer of Lesley Hawthorn's. "To-mor-

row," she said, "I will do it; he will be sure to be here."

And Maurice was there on the morrow, and Marion told him her friend's story. But she told it with all the fire of her indignation and the glow of her interest, and Maurice, who had imbibed by Louis de l'Aubonne's sick-bed some prejudice against the heroine of his little tragedy, was suspicious of some unconscious exaggeration and false colouring in the enthusiasm of her partisanship. Marion quickly saw that, in allowing herself to be carried away by her strong feeling and becoming an advocate, she had half lost the cause. "You don't believe me!" she said, indignantly.

"I cannot but believe the main facts of Miss Hawthorn's account," he answered gravely; "it is no question of believing *you*. I never doubt your good faith on any point."

"The main facts? What do you mean?" asked Marion, eagerly.

"I am afraid Miss Hawthorn—"

"Not one word against her, please—you are unjust. Poor child, what had *she* done? But, man-

like, you take the man's part—yes, even you!" Marion interrupted, in high excitement.

"I have said nothing against her yet. No, Marion—a—Mrs Raymond—I am not going to take the man's part. And I don't want to be hard on her, God forbid! But tell me, have you fairly and unmistakeably ascertained that she was so entirely deceived in the marriage?"

"I am as certain as I am of my own existence."

"No afterthought in her mind that, when things had gone so far, their marriage must be accepted by the family—until Paul's representations to his brother set the case in a new light?"

Maurice would have been easier of belief, possibly, but for his impressions of last night as to Lesley's coquetry. Marion's anger blazed up hot within her as she heard his accusing question seriously and magisterially put, and she could not restrain it. She reproached him for injurious thoughts and false friendship. "You affected an interest in her and talked of considering yourself her guardian," she exclaimed, "and this is all!

You rest in an evident lie got up against her to excuse that man's wickedness and you won't lift a finger to help her! And I who told her to be so sure of help and kindness from you!"

"She shall have my best help and kindness, I promise you that."

"Yes?" Marion looked at him in a way she had which meant, "Tell me the truth, for I am believing you," and which went farther than any question.

"Yes, most surely," responded Maurice.

"And you do believe her account, after all?"

"I have said already that I believed it—in fact what I knew before in a great measure confirms it. And I think my friend Louis wants a little strong advice just now, which, with Miss Hawthorn's consent, I shall take it upon myself to administer."

But Marion understood that he did not wholly withdraw an offensive "But" from his belief, and she was still dissatisfied. "I have told him," she said to Lesley at their next meeting.

"And then?"

"Well, he wants your consent to his taking M. Louis de l'Aubonne in hand. But oh, Lesley, I did tell my story so badly!"

"And he suspects me!" exclaimed Lesley, with pained eagerness. "Well," she went on with the assumed indifference of wounded pride, "let it be so. Tell him I thank him, but would rather he should do nothing."

"The thing was," said Marion, taking no notice of this little speech, "I was too vehement against that unlucky Louis, and that rather confused my explanations. It will be awkward when Mr Maurice comes to speak to him, for he only half sees the truth of the matter."

"What do you mean, Marion?"

"I mean that for your own sake and Louis de l'Aubonne's, and mine as a person unwilling to be the conveying medium of false impressions against either of you or anybody else in the affair, I want you to tell your own story now I have broken the ice for you."

"I can see no necessity, Marion. If Mr Maurice chooses to think ill of me"—she finished the sen-

tence by a curve of the neck and a proud flash from the clear grey eyes.

"Well, Lesley, if you won't, you won't. Only it seems to me no more than an act of justice to every one concerned. And now that Mr Maurice has so decidedly undertaken your championship it seems ungrateful of you to speak so of him."

"Ungrateful! Oh, I did not mean that, Marion."

"I don't think you did, but it is so. And," she added, going on with her arguments, "you will have to say something on the subject to him yourself, surely. It would be a strange and ungracious reserve on your part if all you have to say to him must go through me."

Marion knew where her strength lay: ungrateful and ungracious Lesley Hawthorn would be loth to be.

"I had not thought of that," faltered Lesley.

"No, you careless child, of course you hadn't; you have only been thinking of the shyness and embarrassment and something like pain such a

conversation would give you. But, Lesley dear, isn't that thinking a little too much of your own feelings only?"

"Is it? Am I selfish as well as ungrateful and ungracious? Yes, I am afraid. Marion, do you know, I am often afraid of that—I am selfish down in my heart."

"Not a bit, Lesley; only you have lived so much alone that you have come to think all into yourself and nothing into other people—you don't feel their feelings in them. But that's not the same thing as thinking *of* yourself and not of other people; you don't do that, Lesley."

"Do I not? Sometimes I think I do."

"Does your mother think so, Lesley?"

"Ah, but it is one of my pleasures to give her those little surprises of new comforts. Besides, it is a duty to care for her."

"Well," said Marion, laughing, "if the mere fact of taking pleasure in a kindness makes it selfish I am afraid only very disagreeable people can be unselfish. But I am offering you for once an opportunity of making yourself uncomfortable to

your heart's content to please others; won't you accept it?"

Lesley only smiled; but she had allowed Marion to carry her point, and when she met Maurice she did not refuse to let their conversation pass into the deep channels from which she had shrunk so timorously. And she told him her story in her quiet way, from point to point, sadly but patiently; "for I have no anger against him now," she said, "I only want him to let me be in peace." And Maurice felt that every word she spoke was as true in fact as it was in her thought; he knew it before he had the after-confirmation of Simon Gueret's elaborate narrative of all he had known and done in the case; and he was touched with a deep interest for this young girl, as he saw through her simple confidences something farther into the sanctities of her pure and tender nature, touched with so deep and kind an interest as might perhaps have made another than Marion Raymond jealous.

He lost little time in seeking an interview with Louis: he meant that excitable young man to hear

for once the plain truth which had been deadened to his mind amid such a confusion of sentimental verbiage; he was going to point out to him that in fact he was not the tragic too earnest too constant lover, victim of a miserable fate and a woman's implacability, he imagined himself, but a weak and selfish creature who was adding to the cruelty of his former deception by a persecution of his escaped prey which was almost as wicked, and by which he was making himself not by any means heroic, but entirely ridiculous and only worth notice in consequence of the annoyance he was able to inflict. Maurice was sufficiently confident of his mastery over such a one as Louis de l'Aubonne to feel no doubt of making him listen to the lecture. And he did make him listen, and, delivering it in short cutting phrases, with perfect composure and even without unkindness, made his ridicule and his reproof put poor Louis to shame as nothing else would have done. But the difficulty on which he had not calculated was his own relenting before the young man's utter humiliation. If he had not altogether ex-

pected to be moved to scornful laughter by Louis's passion and tears, at least he did not expect to feel a choking in his own throat in answer to them: and when he had made up his mind not to be weakened by anger, how could he look forward to being so nearly weakened by pity? But he ought to have reflected that no contempt for the sufferer will annihilate the painful impression of the suffering on a man with a heart large and strong enough for pity: if he could not bear to hear a chained dog whine for liberty, or to see a child crying over its lessons, it was not likely he could be a careless witness to a man's hard agony and self-reproach. But, for all that, Maurice was not going to give in; he had come with a stern purpose and he carried it out, and Louis always remembered him an inexorable accuser standing over him in his despair, quietly setting aside every plea he brought forward, not by any means to be put off without the promise he demanded.

There could be but one issue to a meeting between such ill-matched combatants. Louis's im-

petuous physical courage could not stand him in stead here and he had little other; he was crushed at the first onslaught, and after that it was only to summon him long enough and he yielded, quarter or no quarter. He gave the promise, he would trouble Lesley Hawthorn no more. But he was utterly miserable.

"Nay nay," said Maurice, "keep a stout heart, there are years enough before you to find a use for it in. Why should you give yourself up at the first running aground? Start again, mon ami, on a better steered course, and vogue la galère."

Afterwards it was a consolation to Louis to remember that this strong and honourable man, to whom, from the time of their first meeting, his mind had yielded an involuntary deference, had not thought him irretrievably degraded but had bidden him God speed to better things. But just now he felt nothing but that he had given up his last hope—his last hope of happiness and his last hope of escape from the slough of despond into which he was sinking, with its abysmal depths of

recklessness and vice. Desirée could have saved him from himself; now his moral ruin was accomplished, and it was a galling irony to talk to him of a better future, he would rather have been bidden sit still and die. Not one word did he respond to Maurice's encouragement excepting the repetition of his bitter lament, "There remains nothing in life for me."

Maurice thought nothing more remained for him to do there and it was well to go. But he gave a kindly good-bye and a shake of the hand, and he told him this for a friend's helping word, "Mon ami, I believe that there is a God who gives a man strength when he goes to Him for it."

Did Louis believe it? Well, he was not an atheist and he had not deliberately accepted any theory which made the Creator a passive onlooker careless of his creation, and in former days he had spoken grand things to Lesley about the infinity and perfection of the Deity and the beautiful idea of his love permeating and vivifying the world and of his truth being the measure of its exist-

ence. But it is doubtful whether he attached any distinct meaning to the fluent sentences, and when Lesley, admiring her lover's exalted aspirations, had blamed her own incapacity for abstract speculation as the cause of their vagueness to her, perhaps she was doing herself a little injustice and might have ascertained that fact had she thought of putting to him the direct questions with which she sought explanation of the dogmas of ordinary mortals: witness poor Ralph Annesley, whom she had so unconsciously outraged. And, if he really did believe in a God who gave a man strength if he went to Him for it, why had it never occurred to him to go? And why did he not, when Maurice had left him, throw himself, all bruised and broken as he was, upon that last mercy, "Bless me, me also, oh my Father"? Did Louis de l'Aubonne think that comfort Maurice showed him an imaginary one, one assented to out of respect and custom but a broken reed to lean on after all? Do you—and do you—and do you who read? How many of us are there, I wonder, who do not, taking the old saying some-

thing too literally, look to ourselves first for help, and *only*—leaving that little clause concerning some other help that might come to us altogether in the background.

Maurice had not been gone three minutes when he came back again: "I forgot my commission—Miss Hawthorn wished me to give you this."

"I will not take it—I will never take it!" exclaimed Louis. It was the envelope containing Lesley's little note and the ring, and Louis, as we have said, had come to share Lesley's fancy about that ring being still some bond between them.

"No, I will never take it!" he persisted, as Maurice with a "Bah! take your letter," held it out to him again.

"Very well," said Maurice, "if it is not yours it is no one's and the fire is the place for it." And he threw it into the red wood heap on the hearth. "There is an end of it."

Louis sprang forward in time to snatch out the packet, charred and shrivelling but not yet defaced, before it had come a flame. The little

note was still just legible—the ring was safe. "It shall not be destroyed, I will keep it then, keep it in evidence that it is she who is perjured, not I, who would have renewed and strengthened our bond if she had not repulsed me."

"Keep it then," said Maurice, coolly. "It is your own and you can do as you like. All Miss Hawthorn wanted was to return to you what had never been hers. It annoyed her to have charge of it."

Louis was working the ring on to his slender fourth finger, "It shall stay there till I die."

Maurice thought of Mdle. de la Chatellerie: how would she like that when her affianced husband returned to his allegiance? But it was not for him to interfere in that matter; and indeed the arrangement between them was so puzzling to him that he would not have known in what terms to allude to it. So he only said good-bye again, and Louis remained alone, looking at his ring and pondering over and over again one plain sentence spoken by Maurice, "I have already written to my lawyer, and told him to take the necessary

steps towards Miss Hawthorn's being declared free from you in England."

What Louis de l'Aubonne would have given now never to have abjured that marriage!

CHAPTER XIV.

A WOOING AND A WEDDING.

THERE were little bunches of violets to be bought at all the stalls in the flower markets, the first sweet violets so fresh and balmy, with their pleasant promise of spring at hand, blown in the sunshine of the first March days. And through all the tree-rows in the city the branches were spotted with wee buds swelling a little larger and a little larger day by day, and in the Tuilleries gardens the gummy horse-chestnut sheaths were begun to part enough to reveal a tiny folded lump of green between them, and *the* horse-chestnut tree was making haste to have its little green lumps unfolded by the 20th. And everywhere was a twitter of birds and a wakening of insect life and a clearness and brightness of light

and a crisp freshness in the air that gave one a rejoicing consciousness that the blossom season was at hand and the tyranny of the winter broken and passing away.

Gave every one a *rejoicing* consciousness, I think, in spite of certain blustering praisers of King Winter and his cold days. For I am disposed to put very little faith in them and regard them only as feeble imitators of the Red Indian singing jubilantly amid his tortures and making nothing of the arrows sticking in him with their poisoned barbs. I have never yet seen any of them fail, when the hard cold for which they have been crying out arrives at last, to take every precaution against feeling it, nor, when the temperature is such that you can be cold or warm according to your own arrangements, adopt the former alternative. No, the first hard frost down comes my cold-worshipper clothed in garments something of the texture of a Whitney blanket, all a-shiver, and making haste to roast himself into something summer-like before a seven-fold blazing fire. "Glorious weather. This

is something like!" Of course, but if you expect him to remove from that comfortable post on the hearthrug with his back to the fire and allow you, who do not think it glorious and something like, to get thawed, you very much deceive yourself. Why should he indeed? he believes in cold, cold will make you hardy, brace you, &c. "No molly-codling for me," he says cheerfully, "I like a good hard winter." I believe that what he really means is that he likes skating. He does not like the cold, nobody ever did like cold and nobody ever will, but he abstains from grumbling at it because he knows that all the while the ice is thickening and widening upon that capital pond.

And undoubtedly skating is an exhilarating amusement; but then—think how you go shivering and shuddering along the passages to bed, and lie awake at night with a chill creeping over you worse and worse, in spite of an avalanche of bedclothes heaped above you, until the raw morning breaks and you get up and shiver and shudder again through your painful toilet with your fingers

stiff and aching and your feet so numb that you are not sure whether you can move them even when you actually are moving them, with the water and the soap and the sponge and the pomatum all freezing faster than you can thaw them, the very towels stiffened into the consistency of cardboard. Now can any one honestly affirm that such a state of existence is enjoyable? Indeed I think the dormice and other such prudent creatures who sleep cosily through the winter and waken, some of these very much broader awake than we then, only when the days of warmth and sunshine are at hand have a good deal the best of it. And as for the skating, could not the artificial ice inventions be brought to sufficient perfection to freeze us a few broad pools and an unnavigable river or so when the days are long enough for people to take their fling of the enjoyment?

There is a restlessness which comes on some people with those first spring days, a longing to pass out from the towns into the free woodlands, to flee far away over hill and dale to some special

nook dear for memory or for fancy and see what fairy work nature is doing there, and talk to her softly among the budding hedgerows and the primrose banks. Marion had it strong upon her: she was for ever thinking of her Ormeboys woods with their root-barred paths winding along between the great lichen-twined boles, and how the wild hyacinths and the wood anemones were coming up in them everywhere through the fresh green tufts of moss and the trailing carpet of ivy all bright with the young leaves shooting out among the dark veterans of the victorious campaign against winter, and the copses would be fragrant with the breath of violets nestling in their shelter under their thousand and thousand broad leaves, and starry with brighter wild flowers, darlings of the spring, and the ferns would presently fill the brakes and the hollows with their wide fans and fringe the brinks of the rock-breaks and the quarries in the soft rises she had called hills before alpine journeys had taught her that they were no more than hillocks. And above all she recalled the delicious aroma of pines and firs

and the solemn shadow of the quiet plantations where she might wander on and on for hours in that large self-companionship which can be felt only when alone. Or perhaps—no, I do not think that she considered how it might be there if Maurice Maurice were with her. But would the pine woods have been less pleasant to her under such circumstances, after all?

"I am longing for home," said Marion over and over again.

Violet Raymond said nothing; she never did understand her sister-in-law's feeling of kindred and sympathy with the inanimate world, and pine-woods and copses were only pretty rural scenes to her: as she always said, what Marion meant by "finding a living happiness" in such places she couldn't see, but they were certainly pleasant and shady in warm weather. If Violet Raymond was longing to be at home she was not thinking of Ormeboys, but of some nicely furnished suite of apartments in Paris—or if it were to be in one of the provincial towns it would be no harm. Therefore she was disposed to forget that the

plan of their tour was to have terminated with a journey back to England at somewhere about this time. For, as any one can see, it would be most unsatisfactory to depart leaving a certain important matter undecided. And Simon Gueret was not a man to be hurried.

At last Marion said, "I *must* go home:" for when one is almost the mistress of a parish one ought not to be long an absentee, and Mrs Raymond's return was looked for pretty anxiously by this time at Ormeboys, as she well knew. Then Violet answered mournfully, "I suppose we must," and gave up the dream of the suite of apartments in the Parisian or provincial street. "M. Gueret's love," she told Lesley, "is too modest and respectful for him to venture on a declaration so soon, you know—unless he were to have more encouragement than I would give, that is even, you know, if I wished him to do anything of the kind. Of course I only regret it for his sake, I can see that he will feel it so when I am gone. Don't you notice how he looks when Marion—who, dear girl as she is, is, I must say, a *little*

too restless as a companion for me, but I was going to say when she talks about wanting to go to England so soon."

"No: I have not noticed anything unusual," answered Lesley; "though I know he will be sorry when you and Marion go."

"Dear me, how very odd that you shouldn't have remarked it, so *very* marked as his manner is, you know. Not that it matters, for I suppose we shall go at the end of the month, and of course you know I shall keep up my reserve with him. Unless he speaks of his own accord."

Perhaps Miss Raymond had a latent hope that something of these her confidences might be betrayed by Lesley to their subject, or at least some pregnant hint be dropped to rouse his attention to the necessity for his prompter action; but if so she wronged her confidante, whom not even the idea of serving her would have induced to repeat to him one word of the good lady's private communications.

It was surely no infraction of the reserve Violet announced herself as resolved to maintain that

she should herself break to Monsieur Gueret the calamity that was impending over him. She did it with precaution and—perhaps one might say tenderness—anxious to lessen as far as might be the shock the news of her approaching departure must give him, and she had the satisfaction, she said (let us hope the word was honestly used) of finding him bear it with great self-command and dignity. Monsieur Gueret truly regretted to hear that these ladies in whose refined and amiable society he had passed so many agreeable moments were about to fly from the scene which they had adorned with their grace and brilliancy, but trusted that it was not for ever, that our magnificent capital would still possess sufficient attraction for them to incite them to another and a speedy visit. That was all. His diffidence, thought Violet, would not permit him to say anything more pointed, but his urgency for their return thoroughly revealed his secret aspirations.

Still she was inclined to be sentimental in private concerning ties broken never to be renewed and partings which might be for years

but were a good deal more likely to be for ever. And perhaps she did, in spite of reserve, make a few pathetic little remarks partaking somewhat of that tone of feeling in soft moments to Gueret, not of course with any idea of "encouraging" him, but only because it would have been so unkind and so ungenerous to show a total disregard for his feelings at such a time. She drooped at him, if anything, a little more than usual, and perhaps she made little languishing allusions about happy days spent at Paris, and carrying the memory of *some* friends with her always, and loneliness, and the future Madame Gueret, whom no doubt he would introduce to her if ever she met him again—and more of the sort, as an elderly maiden lady who did not wish to be unkind and ungenerous might. At any rate Gueret felt that something was expected of him, and beating a retreat for a couple of days took the matter into consideration in the safety of his own abode; it being necessary to decide it promptly since the lady really was going.

So after all the proposed departure which so

troubled Violet brought her nearer what she—no, to accommodate her, let us say what Simon Gueret had at heart.

Gueret decided. On the third day he appeared in Mrs Raymond's drawing-room with the air of a man whose mind is made up. That was unmistakeable. But his manner was so threefold formal and so impenetrably distant, that Violet shivered internally and gave up her poor little romance at once. Had she not even in her most complacent moments had an uncomfortable suspicion that she might be deceiving herself, that after all there might be, as some ill-natured people said, a little tendency to self-delusion of that nature in her, and this was an instance of it? What wonder then that when it came to a crisis and her fond fancy was brought face to face with the reality it should fail her at the first shock? It was sure to revive again by-and-by as a pleasant theory to buoy up the vanity which made so much of her harmless happiness—but it was clearly not a practical working belief. Violet was disenchanted, her magic castle had

tumbled down about her ears and she had emerged from it into a disagreeable daylight in which she saw herself no longer the coy mistress of a lover's thoughts but a vain old woman who had made a fool of herself. Her cake was dough, as the saying is.

But for what speech was M. Gueret clearing his voice? Why did he rise from his seat and approach the ladies with that portentous mien? To what was that solemn bow a preliminary? No sweet spinster of eighteen could have shewn more startled coyness than our Violet as she heard him, scarcely trusting her own ears.

Monsieur Gueret gave a short retrospect of his past career, alluding to his previous marriage and enlarging on his present widowed state. He briefly but distinctly made a statement of his present financial circumstances, and recurring to the fact of the widowhood pointed out how desirable it was for his comfort that it should cease. He explained that as a man of mature age it behoved him to select for his future and trusted companion some lady arrived at the ripeness of experience,

so that in addition to charms of amiability and accomplishment she might possess a suitable gravity and discretion. And in a peroration of happily introduced compliment to the virtues and graces of Mademoiselle Raymond he ventured to offer himself to Madame Raymond and to her as an aspirant to the honour of her hand.

Now Marion had never contemplated her sanction being required and she was unprepared to answer. For she did not wish for this marriage, which she knew would be considered derogatory by Miss Raymond's family and ridiculous by her acquaintance in general, and, although foreseeing complete failure, she would willingly have made an effort privately to dissuade her sister-in-law from its conclusion. But she felt that she had no right to offer actual opposition; she knew nothing but good of worthy Simon Gueret, and Violet was certainly entitled to take her own course without let or blame from her. So she could neither assent nor dissent, and felt out of patience with the mature but coquettish maiden for the drooping diffidence with which she looked to her to answer

for her and then sat silent with downcast eyes and folded hands.

Happily Gueret himself relieved her from the present responsibility. "Mesdames," he said politely, finding himself unanswered, "I can conceive that in a transaction of this kind you may desire leisure for deliberation. It is quite natural, and I am prepared to see nothing discourteous to myself in such a wish. If then it would be agreeable to you to fix some period for consideration I shall submit myself to your laws."

"You are quite right, M. Gueret," said Marion, catching at the suggestion. "It is a matter on which I am not entitled to decide, but even I am unprepared to say anything on it, and I am sure Miss Raymond must feel unable to answer you at once."

"Oh quite unable," Violet murmured softly. Her French accent was decidedly bad, but Gueret thought it rather musical just then. It was flattering, you see, to find her regarding the transaction love-fashion. There was even something like *empressement* in his manner which made Violet's

heart give a little flutter as he asked "When may I look for an answer? May I hope that my suspense will not be of many hours' duration?"

Cruel Marion quietly fixed an interval of a week, quite understanding a certain shadow falling on her sister-in-law's face as she did it but thinking to herself that, if they must be so absurd as to make her arbitress, she would have some good use of her power. A week would not be too long for inquiry and discussion, and Violet must be made to think, really and actively to think, over her decision—a hard labour for one who left to herself would only dream rosy-lighted matrimonial pictures, like a love-lulled damsel in her teens.

But Miss Raymond, though she did when she heard it think a week a very long time and was only withheld from saying so by a sense of the delicate exigencies of her position, was at heart not sorry to be allowed a little time of delay and of talking it over with Marion before she responded to Gueret's proposal. It had been all very well to take the beatitude of that respectable personage's home for granted and to establish

him the model husband of her spinster idealizations while her little fancies were not called on to undergo the test of practical verification; but a comfortable single lady of fifty might well feel a little trepidation when it came to the point of putting her neck into the yoke and providing herself with a master.

She wanted Marion to deliberate for her, for she soon discovered that her own mind would not remain steadily at a systematic balancing of pros and cons but, after each effort at recalling it to that treadmill of thought for more than a minute or two, passed back into the rest of a brown study. "Do let me hear all *you* think, Marion," she said, giving up the unusual attempt; "I have so much confidence in your judgment, you know. And really I am too much agitated, and no wonder, to be a good judge myself."

But Marion would do no more than state the probabilities and improbabilities of her sister-in-law's happiness as Madame Gueret; she would not pass judgment on the question. Only she told her distinctly that the match, prosperous as it was

shown to be in material comforts, would be distasteful to her high-born connections.

"You lose caste in England, I tell you plainly," she said; "but it is for you to settle whether that is a strong or a slight objection."

"But he is quite a gentleman," remonstrated Violet: "no one can say he isn't that, you know—Can they, do you think?"

"They can say nothing true on that head but that he isn't so high as a Miss Raymond of Ormeboys might have looked: they will say that, and most likely a good deal more."

Violet, remembering that, however high she as Miss Raymond of Ormeboys might have been entitled to look, she had not had the option of doing more than look, thought it hard on her, she said, that she must keep single all her life, whether she liked or not, to please the fancies of people who did not care whether she was alive or dead.

"It would not be to please their fancies," Marion told her, "but your own. It depends on whether you would be distressed by their disparaging opinions or not."

Violet thought she should not.

"I think you would," said Marion. But she would not answer her sister-in-law's, "Should you yourself?"

"One thing, I should not hear them," mused Violet, consoling herself.

"I don't think you would," replied Marion. "But there lies the question. Should you be happy in entirely leaving your own circle, as well as your own country?"

Violet could not answer the question. If Marion had answered for her perhaps it would have been affirmatively, but she felt called on to force her sister-in-law's attention to every objection to this not unobjectionable marriage.

For besides this there were the objections concerning different forms of faith; for Gueret's French Protestantism was not Miss Raymond's English Protestantism; different tongues, for Miss Raymond's French hardly commanded the range of daily domesticities, and Gueret knew only English enough to guess the meaning of a sentence wrong; different habits of life, for Miss Raymond's culinary and house-keeping beliefs were ultra English, and

Gueret's absolutely French. And none of these was poor Violet allowed to ignore, and on none of them would Marion relieve her of the trouble of judgment: never had she passed a more harassing week.

And at last Marion said at breakfast one morning: "Well, Violet, this is the fatal day. Is it going to be, Yes or No?"

"Oh, dear! I don't know," said Miss Raymond, all fluttered. "Which *is* one to say?"

"I know which you *will* say," said Marion, quietly. In spite of her good sister-in-law's vacillations there could be little doubt which way her wishes tended, and if even Marion saw no unanswerable argument against their indulgence it was not likely Violet would.

"You mean that I shall be sure to accept him? But really, Marion, I am not so sure—unless it seemed *quite* prudent, you know. I don't know indeed that (for you know there are so many things to be thought of in an engagement, for though I am not a girl my happiness is just as much concerned, and M. Gueret's, which I'm sure I wish to take into consideration just as much)—

I can't say that my mind is made up; do help me, Marion."

"I ought not to help you," said Marion, trying not to smile, for she knew that the entreaty meant, 'Do tell me it will be a wise thing to accept him.' "But I think—"

And just then a servant came to announce that M. Gueret was waiting in the drawing-room.

"He is in a hurry," said Marion, when the door had closed on the footman. Why, it is not ten o'clock! That's a good sign, Violet."

"Oh dear, oh dear!" Violet was exclaiming, half crying; "I wish he had waited a little later. What *is* to be done?"

"Why go to him at once, and see."

"Oh, but you—you are coming, Marion—Do."

"No," said Marion, decisively; "I told you you must conduct the interview yourself. You'll find it far easier without me than with. Come, you must go." And laughing, she set to work to turn her out of the room.

"Is it Yes or No?" she asked again, as she saw her sister-in-law really preparing to go to the alarming interview.

"I don't know," hesitated Violet: "I think I will just go in and leave it to be settled with him."

"I know what that means," Marion said, and kissed her. "Well, God bless you, Violet."

So Violet Raymond, smiling and tremulous, disappeared into the salon. In what manner she conducted the interview there was never revealed, but when in half an hour's time she came, still smiling and tremulous, to summon her sister-in-law to the meeting she said, with a blush suffusing her cheeks: "Simon would like to speak to you, if you don't mind, dear." And Marion readily understood by the Simon that there had been some little lovemaking going on between the elderly couple, and did not think it necessary to ask again if it were Yes or No.

Well it does not seem such a bad arrangement after all. I do not know why, because a lady from no choice of her own has remained single a good many years, she may not, fortune favouring her in a tardy hour, retrieve herself from the odium of that epithet "of old maid," which is found so intolerable by many respectable females; and

if a gentleman of appropriate seniority, having had the hap to lose his first wife, resolves within himself that she would be neither a reluctant nor an unsuitable successor and that it would be greatly to his comfort that there should be such successor, why should Mr All-the-World and his wife shake with rude guffaws and keep their wit alive for a week on such small aliment as the prosaic nuptials afford?

Or is the matter so prosaic after all? Has it not to that mature couple themselves, if to no one else, the living force, far beyond the reach of ridicule, of being a thing done in earnest? And can any thing in life which is deeply in earnest be called merely prosaic? Is the poetry of life so small a thing that it cannot exist apart from romance? does all tenderness and all pathos and all human-hearted interest and all the underlying meaning of the everyday fade from us with the blossom of youth? And some who are sentimental sigh and say, "Yes, they fade away and all is matter of fact when people grow older." But I say, these remain, for they are matter of fact themselves: and just because they are matter of fact and

simply real they are the essence, the very being of poetry. I suppose a good many people never really understand that poetry, but if they have once done so I do not see why they should ever lose the gift of being able to read it. And if you have it you will see no human life, however colourless, however faded, in which you cannot recognise it.

But as to this engagement: it made a proud and a pleased woman of Violet, and Gueret, after taking a day or so to get quite used to it, became so complacent in it and so well satisfied with his bride elect that his elation, getting the better of his formality, presented him in a new and more genial character and it began to be something less of an impossibility to believe that schoolfellows of his could have known him by the sobriquet of Colin le Malin. And, excepting Violet's redoubtable but happily for her in every way distant kindred, no one in any way concerned was dissatisfied. So that all went well with it, and its happy completion could come with all seemly speed.

So there was great buying and measuring and

devising, and much stirring up of needlewomen and apparellers of all kinds, and the portress at No. 1 Avenue Boissière declared that she was tired to death of the sight of band-boxes and parcels coming from morning till night, while Marion, though she contrived to bear it with a vivacious fortitude, was at least as tired of conferences with enthusiastic milliners and dressmakers, all full of the important subject of the trousseau. And then, almost directly, since for the sake of Marion, who really must go to Ormeboys without more than the inevitable delay, the marriage was fixed for no later than the middle of April, came consultations with the notaries, and at last the signing of the contract.

And then one rainy morning Miss Raymond went forth from her sister-in-law's house, and returned to it at midday Madame Gueret.

END OF VOLUME II.

CAMBRIDGE: PRINTED AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS.